University of Alberta

The Education of a Corps Commander: Arthur Currie's Leadership from 1915-1917

by

©

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Abstract

This thesis studies General Arthur Currie from the years 1915-1917. It details his time as a Brigade and Division commander highlighting important events from this time period. It examines how Currie evolved from a commander with no previous war experience to a highly successful commander on the Western Front. The thesis is rooted in the 'Currie Framework' and employs this framework to analyze the development and refinement of Currie's command philosophy; this command philosophy acted as the foundation for Currie's success as a commander.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years or so military historians have published numerous detailed examinations of the role played by the Canadian Corps during the First World War.[1] What continues to make this subject so intriguing is that by the end of the war the Canadian Corps became one of the most effective fighting formations on the Western Front. The Germans feared them, and the British employed them at every opportunity. More interesting to military historians is the fact that the corps developed from a haphazard organization of various units under British officers, into a finely tuned fighting formation under Canadian leadership. The study of the development and success of the Canadian Corps has occupied a special place in Canadian military scholarship.

The Canadian Corps was formed out of four Canadian divisions sent to France in a piece-meal fashion. The soldiers and officers of the Canadian Corps were, for the most part, inexperienced and under-trained at the outset of hostilities. These men underwent a brutal and violent process whereby they evolved from inexperienced soldiers to battle-hardened shock troops. Their leader, Sir Arthur Currie, personified the process of development that the Canadian Corps underwent. He too began the war as an unseasoned officer and through numerous military operations developed into Canada's greatest general. This thesis will examine the process by which Arthur Currie developed his command philosophy and transformed himself from the ill-trained commander of the 2nd Brigade to a seasoned corps commander who led the Canadians in their greatest military achievements during the 100 Days Campaign.

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[1] Such works include Daniel G. Dancocks Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War. (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987); John Swettenham. Breaking the Hindenburg Line. (Ottawa: Balmuir Book Publishing, 1986); Bill Rawling. Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1992); Shane B. Schreiber, Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War. (Connecticut: Praeger, 1997); J.L. Grantstein and Desmond Morton. Canada and the Two World Wars. (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2003).

The offensive known as the 100 Days Campaign, from August 1918 to November 1918, saw the Canadian Corps reach a level of success never before achieved by a Canadian formation. During this offensive the Canadian Corps led every single major British operation. At the battle of Amiens, the Canadian Corps spearheaded what came to be known as the "Black Day" of the German army. In early September, they captured the intricate defensive network known as the Drocourt-Queant line. On 27 September, the corps stormed across the seemingly impenetrable Canal Du Nord and captured the heights in Bourlon Wood paving the way for the capture of the city of Cambrai. The Canadians bombarded Valenciennes into surrender and eventually took the city of Mons on the 11th of November. The war finally came to an end for the Canadians after a period of unrivaled military success.

By the end of the 100 Days campaign the Canadian Corps had liberated 228 cities and towns in North Eastern France and Belgium as well as over 500 square miles of French and Belgium territory. They captured 31, 537 German prisoners, 623 guns, 2,842 machine guns as well as 336 trench mortars.[2] To put this in context one could compare the performance of the American Expeditionary Force to the Canadian Corps in 1918.

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[2] Statistics derived from Arthur Currie. Canadian Corps Operations During the Year 1918. (Ottawa: Department of Militia and Defence. 1919.)

Table 1

	American	Canadian
Troops engaged	650,000	105,000
Duration of Operations	47 days	100 days
Max. Distance Advanced	34 miles	86 miles
German Divisions Defeated	46	47
Average Number of Casualties Suffered per German Div. Defeated	2,170	975
Total Casualties	100,000	45,830[3]

This table is not intended to show that the Canadians were in any way 'better' than the Americans. Indeed, the Americans achieved paramount success during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. This table demonstrates the efficiency of the Canadian Corps. The most notable difference is that the Canadian Corps was much smaller than the A.E.F. and it was in the field for a longer period of time. Even with these disadvantages it was able to conquer more territory against a similar number of German divisions and lose fewer men per ratio of German divisions encountered.

The 100 Days campaign holds great significance. It is more than merely a celebrated period in Canadian military history. The period of the 100 Days Campaign witnessed the birth of modern warfare. Semi-mobile combat, specialized infantry groups, combined-arms operations, massive employment of ancillary branches to facilitate rapid advances, and utilization of new weapons technology are merely some of the major developments employed consistently and successfully throughout this period. This was the method of warfare that would manifest itself on the battlefields throughout the balance of the twentieth century.

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[3] Table 1 from Shane B. Schreiber. Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War. (Connecticut: Praeger, 1997) p 133.

What must be understood here was that the Canadian Corps' success during this period was a product of several years of development on the battlefields of Western Europe. If there is one man who epitomized this development of the Canadian Corps, it was Sir Arthur Currie. Currie grew up in Napperton, Ontario and as a young adult moved to Victoria, British Columbia where he pursued a career in teaching and later selling real estate. During his time in Victoria he enlisted in the local militia, an artillery regiment, where he was soon promoted to commanding officer. Due to his friendship with Garnet Hughes, son of the Canadian Minister of Militia Sam Hughes, he was given command of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade at the outbreak of the war.

The man who came to be known as Canada's greatest general started off as most of the soldiers in the Canadian Corps, untrained and inexperienced, a product of a haphazard militia system in one of Britain's dominions. As G.F.R. Henderson, a Civil War military historian, once stated, "The history of famous armies is the history of great generals, for no army ever achieved great things unless it has been well commanded."[4] In 1914, Currie was a Brigade commander with as little field experience as the raw troops he commanded.[5] Yet, by 1918 he was the commander of the Canadian Corps and pivotal in the role the corps would play during the 100 Days Campaign. As Shane Schreiber wrote, "An examination of the transformation of Sir Arthur Currie from a colonial militiaman into a highly respected corps commander provides a fascinating study of generalship."[6]

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[4] G.F.R. Henderson. Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1898) Currie gained a respect for the leadership style of Gen. Jackson after reading this biography in 1917.

[5] The 'Dandy Fifth,' the artillery regiment Currie belonged to, was one of the most professional militia units in Canada. Daniel Dancocks lists the militia regiments numerous awards and citations prior to World War One on page 20 in his book Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography. (Toronto: Methuen, 1985). However, the training he received while an officer in this unit was not nearly sufficient to prepare him for the realities of the First World War.

This thesis will examine the evolution of Sir Arthur Currie from an inexperienced militia officer to a forward thinking, highly innovative and very successful Corps commander. It will specifically analyze his time commanding the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade and the 1st Canadian Division. This study will examine and analyze operations and events to try to understand how Currie evolved as a commander. By focusing on these various experiences one can witness Currie's development as a commander and specifically the development of Currie's command philosophy. This study will focus on Currie's beginning as an inexperienced Brigade commander and his transformation into what is widely perceived as Canada's greatest general; it will give little attention to his time as Corps commander, as the specifics of his success during this period are not the focus of this piece, and have been given ample coverage by others.[7] However, this study will focus heavily on the events of his service from 1915 to 1917, and will pinpoint operations and events during this period that led to development of his command philosophy.

Command philosophy is made up of two distinct elements, tactical implementation and leadership methods. Tactical implementation is the commander's use of all available units for a given battle. This includes not only the fighting units, but all aspects of available forces that facilitate battlefield manoeuvre. Furthermore, tactical implementation is a byproduct of the tactical theory employed by the commander. That is the personal theoretical foundation for the tactical decisions made.

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[6] Schreiber, p 17.

[7] Shane Schreiber provides the most detailed analysis of Currie's time as a Corps commander.

Leadership methods are a much more personal aspect of command. The phrase refers specifically to the process of preparing those available units for battle. This can be in several forms: training, equipping, organizational skills, inspiration and motivation of troops, adequate officer staffing, and in Currie's case, personal developmental. The combination of tactical implementation and leadership methods can be defined as a command philosophy. This is simply a term used to describe the theory employed by a commander in all aspects of his command duties that affect all elements of his operational decisions. From pre-battle preparations, to battlefield activities, to post-battle operations, command philosophy dictates how a commander reacts and interacts with the numerous challenges and obstacles facing him throughout these stages. With these definitions in mind we will be able to successfully analyze the development of Arthur Currie.

Establishing a framework for the study of Arthur Currie is important as it prescribes a basis for an analysis of the evolution of a commander who prior to a military conflict has no battlefield experience and was forced to learn and develop a command philosophy in the crucible of battle. The 'Currie framework' can be divided into three successive stages; development, refinement and vindication. The developmental stage is the period during which Currie, lacking any actual war-time experience, relied on his personality traits to evolve some sort of basic command philosophy. His most valuable characteristics were his calm demeanour and common sense. His most important quality was his insistence on post-action analysis. This aspect of his command philosophy allowed him to understand the nature of the battlefield he was fighting on and prescribe solutions to the tactical stagnation permeating the First World War battlefield. For Currie, the developmental stage occurred during his time as a Brigade commander.

The second stage will be referred to as the refinement phase. During this stage, when Currie's basic command philosophy had taken shape, it now underwent a lengthy process of refinement and trial and error. For Currie, this period involved experimenting with various weapons, the establishment of thorough reconnaissance practices, stressing the need for proper preparation and training for every operation, an obsessive demand for ample support in the form of men and material and finally a continued determination to analyze every operation. This stage occurred while Currie was in command of the 1st Division and began planning and executing offensive operations.

The final stage is called the vindication stage. This is where a command philosophy that has gone through a lengthy process of refinement is finally put to the test. For the purposes of this study, Currie's vindication stage began at Vimy Ridge and continued through the 100 Days Campaign where numerous tactical initiatives proposed by Currie were implemented with great success. The three stages of the 'Currie framework' provide a solid foundation for a study of a commander who with no pre-war military experience is forced to learn in the only classroom available, the actual battlefield.

This study will analyze Currie from a military historical perspective and place Currie on a military history timeline within the context of the evolution of warfare. The First World War was a turning point in the history of military conflict and ushered in the modern age of warfare. Currie was a commander who rose from obscurity and developed into Canada's most successful general in a war that pitted traditional tactics against modern technology. He was able to overcome this paradigm of tradition versus modernity and develop tactical methods that led to a stunning record of success.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Sir Arthur Currie continues to be the subject of much attention from the Canadian military history community. There have been three significant biographies and numerous books analyzing the operations he was involved in.[8] Yet there remains an intellectual gap within this historiography. Books that have addressed the man have often done so in a biographical format. Hugh M. Urquhart, Jack Hyatt and Daniel Dancocks have all approached the subject of Arthur Currie in a slightly different manner; yet have stayed relatively true to the biographical formula. Other works like Shane Schreiber's Shock Army of the British Empire[9] or Bill Rawling's Surviving Trench Warfare[10] have been devoted to operational examinations of the Canadian Corps. Schreiber's book addresses the period of the 100 Days Campaign, where the Canadian Corps spearheaded the last British offensive of the war leading to Germany's surrender. Bill Rawling examines the influence that technology played in the adoption and evolution of tactics arguing that it was technology that motivated tactical change throughout the First World War. Although both works analyze certain aspects of the Canadian Corps and its operational success, they spend little time on how the leadership of the Canadian Corps developed and implemented the tactical initiatives that became standard during the final year of the war.

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[8] Dancocks, Schreiber, Rawling and Swettenham have all analyzed the operations where as texts like Daniel G. Dancocks Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography. (Toronto: Methuen, 1985); A.M.J. Hyatt. General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Hugh Urquhart. Arthur Currie: The Biography of a Great Canadian. (Vancouver: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1950) are the three most notable biographies of Arthur Currie.

[9] Shane B. Schreiber. Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War. (Connecticut: Praeger, 1997).

[10] Bill Rawling. Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1992).

The gap here is evident. The biographies of Currie spend their entirety relaying the life of the man while focusing little on his tactical development during the war. Schreiber's book focuses entirely on 1918 and spends very little time discussing Currie's development as a commander. Rawling ignores the agency of the commander and argues that the technological developments during the war were the prime motivation for tactical development. There has been no analysis of how Currie went from the inexperienced Brigade commander of 1915 to the highly competent corps commander of 1917-18. This thesis is an attempt at filling that intellectual gap. It will be an examination of the generalship of Arthur Currie. Furthermore, it will focus on the process of tactical evolution that Currie went through from 1915 to 1917.

This study has a broader meaning than merely analyzing the evolution of a corps commander. It addresses the idea of the learning curve within the military. The military learning curve refers to the process by which soldiers develop strategic, operational and tactical theories based on their experiences. It is not Currie's command philosophy in itself that becomes so important within this study but how Currie came to recognize that the implementation of that philosophy would be conducive to success. For modern military analysts, this conceptual framework carries with it important implications. Essentially, by analyzing how military commanders in the past have developed, it may be possible to create similar methods in order to develop present-day commanders. It is through studies like this that current military analysts and defence scientists can come to a better understanding of how command development occurs.

In order to come to grips with Currie's development, a historiographical foundation of this topic must be established. Hugh M. Urquhart wrote the earliest biographical account of Arthur Currie in 1950.[11] In his book, Urquhart covers the life span of Currie from his boyhood years in Ontario, his adult years in Victoria through his war years and details his life as McGill University's president. Urquhart's section on the Great War is a detailed, chronological account of Currie's activities during that period. He provides descriptions of the actions Currie was involved in and the role that Currie played within them. However, Urquhart focuses less on what made Currie a good commander, although it is somewhat implicit within his work, and focuses more on the events themselves and the role Currie played in those events. One of the major themes in Urquhart's account is Currie's ability to analyze military operations in great detail and his ability to learn from every experience. After every action he would attempt to reconstruct the successful and unsuccessful elements of the operation. This applied to operations he was involved in and some he was not "The evidence of his balanced mind was visible on all sides. It was also based on his keen observation and discerning mind that studied closely the training manuals and analyzed the lessons…"[12] Currie's insistence on post action analysis is arguably his most important characteristic as a military commander.

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[11] Hugh M. Urquhart. Arthur Currie: The Biography of a Great Canadian. (Vancouver: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited) 1950. Urquhart himself was a distinguished veteran of the First World War, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and the Military Cross. In 1940, Urquhart was commissioned Colonel and commanding officer of the Canadian Scottish Regiment and served in this post till the end of the war. The earliest account of the 100 Days Campaign comes in 1919 with J.F.B Livesay's Canada's Hundred Days (Toronto: T. Allen Ltd) 1919.

[12] Urquhart, p 268.

Urquhart emphasizes that it was Currie's ability to inspire loyalty amongst his immediate subordinates that stands out as another of his defining traits. Urquhart cites a number of quotes from Currie's subordinate officers supporting this argument and states: "An influence of this nature by whatever name it be called must have exercised a widespread power for good within the Corps."[13] Urquhart's analysis of Currie as a commander ends at this point. The major problem evident in Urquhart's analysis is the lack of linkage between Currie's characteristics as a commander and how those characteristics shaped his command philosophy. He chronologically accounts for Currie's actions in the First World War then proceeds with a small commentary in his conclusion on why Currie was so successful. Yet, he does not explore any connections between Currie's characteristics as a commander and specific events throughout his military career. Urquhart merely assumes that his commentary at the end of his chapters on the war will suffice.

Daniel Dancocks takes up the biographical formula in Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography.[14] In his book, Dancocks explores in greater detail the significant characteristics of Currie's command and spends some time discussing important events in the development of Currie as a commander. However, like Urquhart, Dancocks covers the lifetime of Arthur Currie and limits his discussion of Currie's wartime operations. Dancocks accounts for Currie's roles within each operation. He highlights Currie's ability for organization and his demand for preparation before any attack. He spends a good portion of his discussion of Currie's early command years addressing specifically the impact that Currie's tour of the Verdun battlefields had on his theories of command.[15]

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[13] Urquhart, p 270.

[14] Daniel G. Dancocks. Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography. (Toronto: Methuen) 1985. Dancocks was a graduate of the University of Alberta who died in 1991. He produced several works on the Canadians in World War One and was a noted broadcast journalist as well as historian.

Dancocks highlights several elements of Currie's command style that were conducive to his success as a leader. Firstly, he notes that Currie was the "master of the set-piece battle."[16] At the same time, Dancocks notes, "in a war characterized by its stultifying static nature, he understood the need for manoeuvre wherever and whenever possible."[17] Dancocks discusses Currie's 'militia mentality' going into the war. This militia mentality refers to officers who were not raised in the strict British officer class system and therefore had a greater tendency to question superior officers when they felt uneasy about certain aspects of their command decisions. He argues that it was the lack of indoctrination in military rules, regulations and orthodoxy that allowed Currie to maintain an open mind. This 'militia myth', that is the notion that militia officers were better suited for war than regular officers, is an interesting concept. It was first hypothesized in a well-known comment by British Prime Minister David Lloyd George yet is wholly unsatisfactory in explaining Currie's open mind on the battlefield. Not all militia officers became great commanders during the war and many regular army officers served with distinction. Dancocks discusses Currie's personal attributes contributing to his success like his ability to manage large groups efficiently as well as his excellent common sense.

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[15] In 1916 Currie examined the Verdun battlefields. It was here that a massive German offensive was launched against a series of French fortresses leading to an eleven month period of combat resulting in almost a million casualties.
[16] Dancocks, p 175.
[17] Dancocks, p 176.

One interesting aspect of Dancocks evaluation is his comparison of Sir Julian Byng and Arthur Currie. Byng was a British regular officer who commanded the Canadian Corps until 1917 and Dancocks rightfully notes, "It would be injustice to overlook Sir Julian Byng's impact on the Canadian Corps."[18] Dancocks then goes on to discuss, briefly, how Byng as a career soldier and Currie as a peacetime militia soldier would have had a different impact on the Corps during its most successful period. Dancocks argues that had Byng been in command of the corps for the remainder of 1917, the attack on Hill 70 would have never taken place. The British High Command originally intended the Canadians to attack a different point along the Messines Ridge. Currie after reviewing the intended attack plan and the German position argued against this attack proposing that the Canadians attack the much more tenable objective of Hill 70. Dancocks argues that Byng would have not recommended the attack on Hill 70 to replace the poorly designed attack plan by British First Army headquarters. The attack on Hill 70 took place in August of 1917 and inflicted severe casualties on the Germans most of which came with the repeated counter-attacks by the Germans to try and regain their lost ground. Dancocks reinforces the militia myth by implicitly arguing that Byng's career soldier mentality would have prevented him from questioning British High Command. Currie's militia background, he argues, led him to question the original attack plan and change it accordingly. One aspect Dancocks fails to note is the fact that Currie was essentially a representative of his country being the highest ranking Canadian soldier in the war. This semi-autonomous position allowed him to question orders from British High Command without suffering significant consequences like losing his position.

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[18] Dancocks, p 177.

Where Dancocks and Urquhart adhere to a biographical formula in their work, authors like Shane Schreiber and Bill Rawling take a different approach towards Arthur Currie and the Canadian Corps. Rawling examines the relationship between various technological innovations and the resulting tactical implications of these technologies. Furthermore, he argues that it was the successful implementation of new technology in cooperation with an efficient tactical system that acted as one of the major reasons for the Canadian Corps success.

Rawling divides the war into two phases; the first phase being from 1914 to the end of 1916 where, he argues, there was little success in adopting a tactical system that could efficiently overcome the technological domination of the battlefield. The second phase, from late 1916 to the end of the war saw the rapid development of new tactical systems along with the implementation of newer technological models.[19] Rawling argues that it was the concept of platoon level tactics that truly developed during this second phase along with a proliferation of weapon specialization within infantry groups. Furthermore, this second phase witnessed a growing emphasis on fire and movement tactics, specifically cooperation between infantry and artillery. It was these factors that created the environment in the second phase that allowed for the unprecedented success not seen in the first phase of the war. Rawling is accurate in certain respects in that the development of platoon tactics and the implementation of weapon specialization within these small units became one of the most successful tactical initiatives of the period. However, Rawling ignores the role of the commanding officer in instigating the development of these initiatives and addresses the wholesale adoption of platoon level tactics as standard throughout the entire British Expeditionary Force.

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[19] Rawling, p 221-223.

Where does Arthur Currie fit in Rawlings schematic map of the war? Rawling argues, "the Germans can take much of the credit for most of the technological developments the Canadians adopted: for it was mainly in reaction to their enemy's defensive techniques, not through any intuitive perception of the technology's usefulness, that the Allies brought the increasingly complex tools to the battlefield."[20] This view contains some essential truths. However, it ignores the issue of agency from within the officer class of the Canadian Corps and Allied command. Granted, many of the German initiatives were quickly adapted into the B.E.F., however, it is the efficient adaptation and implementation of these tactics that needs to be recognized. The German army may have developed many of the tactical and technological initiatives seen throughout the war, but as much credit must be given to the army that effectively employs these new methods as the army that invented them. For instance, it was the British Army that first employed tanks on the Western Front yet it was the Germans that mastered tank tactics in the Second World War. Obviously the British should not be given credit for the German army's implementation of tank tactics in the Second World War. Then neither should the German army be given credit for inventing tactical and technological initiatives when elements of the British and French armies implemented them with greater success. Furthermore, it is through the commanding officer that these new tactics and technologies are implemented and Rawling fails to address this fact.

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[20] Rawling, p 223.

In the case of the Canadian Corps it was men like Julian Byng, and to a greater extent Arthur Currie that facilitated this implementation. In many instances Currie recognized that certain technologies would not be effective, like the Colt machine gun and Ross Rifle. In other situations he called for an increased use in certain technologies, like hand-bombs and their successful use in clearing out enemy trenches. Furthermore, Currie recognized the potential of a mobile machine gun Brigade, a formation not seen in any other Allied or German command. By 1917 Currie stressed platoon level tactics and became fanatical about training soldiers in these platoon tactics. When Rawling argues that it was the combination of technology and tactics that won the war on the Western Front, it is necessary to understand that many of these new methods of warfare originate or are initiated by the officers in command. For all the armies fighting in the First World War, it was commanders like Arthur Currie that facilitated the introduction, training and effective implementation of new technologies and tactics that made the difference between success and failure on the Western Front.

The most comprehensive book to follow up any biographical account of Currie's life would be Shane Schreiber's Shock Army of the British Empire.[21] Schreiber gives a detailed operational analysis of the Canadian Corps during the 100 Days Campaign highlighting the string of successes and analyzing the factors that led to those victories. Schreiber uses the metaphor of a conductor, an orchestra and the conductor's grand concerto. Arthur Currie is the conductor; the Canadian Corps the orchestra and the 100 Days Campaign is the Corps greatest performance. Schreiber does not focus solely on Currie's role during this period; he attempts to critically analyze all aspects of the Corps operational procedures during this period. Schreiber does not provide a study of leadership, as this thesis will. He instead provides an analytical examination at the factors that contributed to such an unprecedented level of operational success on the Western Front.

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[21] Shane B. Schreiber. Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War. (Connecticut: Praeger, 1997.)

Schreiber does however spend some time in his early chapters briefly discussing Currie's development writing,

> Currie approached the problem of war with the only skills he had, that of a studious, pragmatic man. Analytical and open-minded, Currie took a practical approach to the solution of tactical problems, seeking the advice of the best minds with which he could surround himself. By the time of his appointment to Corps command in the summer of 1917, Currie was a true professional, having received his military education in that most efficiently brutal school of all, the actual battlefield.[22]

Schreiber even makes a comparison between the development of American Civil War general Ulysses S. Grant and the development of Arthur Currie. He points out that both men came from relative obscurity to lead armies in unconventional wars and were forced to develop operational doctrines based upon battlefield experience, not from a field manual in a classroom.

If Schreiber studies the operational results of Currie's development, Jack Hyatt's biography of Sir Arthur Currie provides the strongest analysis of the development of Currie's command philosophy and most importantly provides a realistic framework of his leadership methods.[23] His book stays true to the biographical formula yet attempts to open up new avenues of exploration into the subject of Arthur Currie. Hyatt examines Currie's years as the commander of the 2nd Canadian Brigade and the 1st Canadian

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[22] Schreiber, p 18.

[23] Jack Hyatt is a retired professor of military history from the University of Western Ontario.

Division. He spends some time analyzing specific events during that time. Two of the most notable experiences were the actions at Regina Trench and the 'Verdun Report.' However, Hyatt's work addresses only certain events within Currie's early command years, essentially scratching the surface of a much larger study in leadership.[24]

In The Mask of Command, John Keegan discusses the problems with attaching a framework or as Keegan calls it, "a formula," to the art of generalship.[25] He argues that, "warfare of any one society may differ so sharply from that of another that commonality of trait and behavior in those who direct it is overlaid altogether in importance by differences in purposes they serve and the functions they perform."[26] Keeping this statement in mind, however, it is necessary to come to grips with dominant themes within a specific case study in order to render an effective analysis. Hyatt provides this effective framework. For Hyatt, Currie's significant leadership qualities were tactical comprehension, commitment to post-action analyses, organization skills, fanaticism about training and communication, as well as an open mind.[27] Currie's use of these five qualities will be obvious throughout the period that this examination covers.

This thesis is essentially divided into two parts. Part one will treat Currie's time as commander of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade and his first experiences in battle. Part Two will examine his time as commander of the 1st Canadian Division. The first part examines Currie's first taste of action at Neuve Chapelle, through his most harrowing operation at the battle of Second Ypres and his final days as a Brigade commander at the battle of Festubert. Part Two examines Currie's time as division commander and includes an analysis of the battle of Mount Sorrel. It then turns to a discussion of Currie's August memorandum and Verdun report as well as the involvement of the 1st division in the Somme offensive. Finally it examines the battle of Vimy Ridge, Currie's last major action as a division commander. To understand the evolution of Currie's command philosophy one must start with Currie's first taste of command in 1915 as commanding officer of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade.

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[24] A.M.J. Hyatt. General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.)
[25] John Keegan. The Mask of Command. (New York: Viking Penguins Inc. 1987.)
[26] Keegan, p 1.
[27] Hyatt, p 51.

Part 1: Brigade Commander

1.1 The Battle of Neuve Chapelle, March 1915

Arthur Currie and the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade arrived in France in February of 1915 and quickly began their indoctrination trench routine. This process of trench indoctrination was mandatory for every newly arrived Brigade on the Western Front. They would undergo a period of familiarization with the routine of occupying trenches. Currie's Brigade completed this process with the British 4th and 7th Divisions. In March, Currie's Brigade was placed under the command of General Alderson and the 1st Canadian Division.[1] On 3 March the 1st Canadian division took over a 6400 yard front from the British 7th Division at Fleurbaix. Currie's 2nd Brigade took over for the British 21st Brigade and instances of enemy sniping and shelling commenced upon their arrival. It was in this sector that the 2nd Brigade would play a minimal role in their first operation.

The operation, that would come to be referred to as the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, called for a front wide assault by Sir Douglas Haig's 1st Army. The main objective was the capture of the town of Neuve Chapelle, followed up by the capture of Aubers Ridge several miles beyond. The Canadian 1st Division was to conduct a firing demonstration along their front in order to prevent the Germans from rushing up reinforcements. In case of a breakthrough by the British, the Canadians would act as a reserve intended to exploit this breakthrough. The British attack on 10 March was initially quite successful. The attack caught the Germans with very few troops stationed in their front line and managed to open a breach in the German position. However, miscommunication and fatigued troops prevented the British from exploiting this breach. Furthermore, after a day of allowing the Germans to reinforce their new positions Haig ordered another attack. On 11 March British troops proceeded to assault newly fortified German positions and were repelled with great loss. The element of surprise was lost after the attack on the 10th, resulting in high casualties with nothing to show for it.

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[1] It is important to understand the organization of a Canadian infantry brigade during World War One in order to understand Currie's responsibilities during this period. A standard Canadian brigade (as well as a standard British brigade) contained four battalions of roughly 700 combat ready men. At the beginning of the war the 2nd brigade contained the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th battalions. Usually three battalions would be used for combat while the fourth was used for reinforcement and rear duty purposes.

The battle of Neuve Chapelle gave Arthur Currie a valuable opportunity to realize certain deficiencies within specific weapons allocated to his unit. Currie wrote a series of memoranda explaining these deficiencies. His first objection pertained to the Colt machine guns issued to his Brigade. A letter written by Currie dated 15 March 1915 and sent to 1st Division headquarters detailed the problems with the machine guns and their mounts. The letter was in response to a previous inquiry into increasing the size of the machine gun mounts. However, Currie used this as an opportunity to voice his concerns over the weapon as a whole. He wrote, "I beg to state that I agree with Major Brutinel that increasing the clearance to 3 inches clear would be an improvement to the mount; but, to my mind, this is the least objectionable fault with the new mounts."[2] Currie went on to detail a series of deficiencies with the machine guns and their mounts: the poor condition of the gun saddles, mounts issued without gun pins, faulty belt feeding mechanisms resulting in the need of a second man to guide the ammunition belt into the machine gun. He concluded his letter by stating, "I would suggest that the new mounts be taken by Ordinance back into stores by the same method of transport as they were brought to us, there to remain until the defects which I have intimidated, have been corrected."[3]

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[2] Arthur Currie. Letter to 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. 15 March, 1915. National Archives of Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.

Currie also discussed the use of machine gun shields. He stated that shields would be preferable on machine guns as long as they did not interfere with the mobility of the weapon itself. Currie argued that the only time mobility could be sacrificed for the use of a shield was during night attacks, "…on account of the position of the gun being given away so much more easily than in the day time, I would prefer the extra protection afforded by the shield even if mobility entailed by its use was lessened."[4] Currie went on to argue for the use of shields at all times citing four main factors in the construction of these shields; the weight must be no more than 30 lbs, the range at which it resists a German bullet should be approximately 150 yards, the shape and size of the shield being 24 inches by 18 inches and easily packed, and finally a simple mounting mechanism so that it does not interfere with machine gun tripods.[5]

One of the most significant weapon deficiencies Currie discovered as a result of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle was with the Ross Rifle. Whereas British troops were issued the British made Lee-Enfield Rifle, Canadians were issued the Canadian-made Ross Rifle. There were a number of deficiencies with the Ross Rifle that were discovered over time. Most significantly, it had the propensity to jam when dirty. This was clearly unacceptable during trench warfare where mud, muck and mire were ubiquitous. Yet another shortcoming was that the standard .303 calibre bullet issued to the Canadian troops did not fit properly into the rifle's chamber, therefore causing it to jam up or back fire. Currie wrote to 1st Division Headquarters on 16 March,

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[3] Currie, Letter to 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. 15 March, 1915.

[4] Arthur Currie. Letter to 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. 23 March, 1915. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.

[5] Currie, Letter to 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. 23 March, 1915.

> …the Officers commanding Battalions of this Brigade have reported that the Small Arm Ammunition of British Manufacture does not work as well in the Ross Rifle as the ammunition of Canadian manufacture.
>
> They find, after firing a few rounds, that the shells seem to stick in the bore and are not easily extracted, in fact, more than ordinary pressure must be applied. It seems that the cartridge case is slightly smaller than those of Canadian manufacture and on expansion fits the bore so tightly that the difficulty mentioned above takes place.
>
> This seems to me to be a point where the most rigid investigation is necessary, as a serious interference with rapid firing may prove fatal on occasions.[6]

It is obvious that Currie had significant concerns with the Ross Rifle after its first major test in an operation. This letter would foreshadow a lengthy and disastrous process whereby the Ross Rifle was found to be inadequate for the demands of trench warfare and finally discarded. The Canadian troops would eventually be issued the much more reliable British standard issue Lee Enfield rifle.

What becomes apparent after the Battle of Neuve Chapelle is Arthur Currie's concern with having the best equipment available for his troops. Where as other Brigade commanders may have felt that these complaints were minor or even unwarranted, Currie made sure his Division commander was aware of his concerns. Currie understood early in the war that sending troops into battle without adequate equipment was tantamount to disaster. Furthermore, Currie was not afraid to voice his concerns to his commanding officer. Although just a pre-war militia officer, Currie understood that these concerns were warranted in order for his troops to have any sort of success in the appalling battlefield conditions that they faced. This demand for the best equipment would remain consistent throughout his war years. His common sense enabled him to understand the importance of proper equipment. He had seen limited action yet already devoted his time to analyzing and studying the events that occurred in order to derive any sort of lessons that could help improve his unit. Currie would need to take all the lessons he could get from what little experience he had because his biggest challenge as a Brigade commander would come in April of 1915 when the 1st Canadian Division took over a section of the Ypres Salient.

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[6] Arthur Currie. Letter to 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. 16 March, 1915. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.

1.2 The Second Battle of Ypres, April 1915

The Second Battle of Ypres was Currie's first significant test as a commander. In April of 1915 the Germans attacked the French Algerian Division stationed to the left of the Canadian Division. The Algerians fell back in panic after the Germans released a chlorine gas cloud. After pushing back the Algerians, the Germans began pressing all sides of the Canadian Division. Near the end of the battle, Currie's Brigade stood alone while it was assaulted on its front and both flanks. This action was the first significant test for Currie as a commander. His calm demeanour and composure marked his leadership style throughout this battle. His constant demand for information kept him apprised of the situation and allowed him to make crucial decisions, thus preventing the Germans from achieving a significant breakthrough of the Canadian line.

Since the late autumn of 1914 there existed a large seventeen-mile salient centred on the ancient town of Ypres. This salient had been manned for quite some time by French troops and projected directly into German held territory. In April, soldiers of the

British Expeditionary Force relieved the French troops stationed in this sector. In mid-April the 1st Canadian Division relieved the French 11th Division and began their tour of duty.

On arrival the Canadians were shocked to realize the difference in the British and French methods of trench warfare. Nicholson's official history records how the French and British methods of defence differed greatly therefore affecting the construction of front line trenches. The French would hold the front line with a minimal number of troops, relying on their artillery to compensate in the face of German attacks. The British method of defence held that the front line was to be maintained by a maximum number of troops and was to be defended with the utmost ferocity. Whereas the French would withdraw to reserve trenches at the first sign of a German attack, relying on their excellent 75 mm guns to halt the German advance, the British would stage their main defence on the front line.[7]

The 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade entered the Ypres salient under appalling conditions. Due to the French having little concern for the integrity of the front line trench, the Canadians came into a section of the line that was wholly neglected. Nicholson writes,

> They found unconnected lengths of fieldworks without the customary traverses for protection against enfilading fire. Because the closeness of the water to the surface prevented digging to a depth of more than two feet, there was a need for building up the parapets into breastworks of sod, mud or sandbag four feet or more high, but these were flimsily constructed, and seldom thick enough to stop bullets, in some places they did not exist. There was no parados to give protection from the rear…the trenches were sadly deficient in the matter of sanitation.[8]

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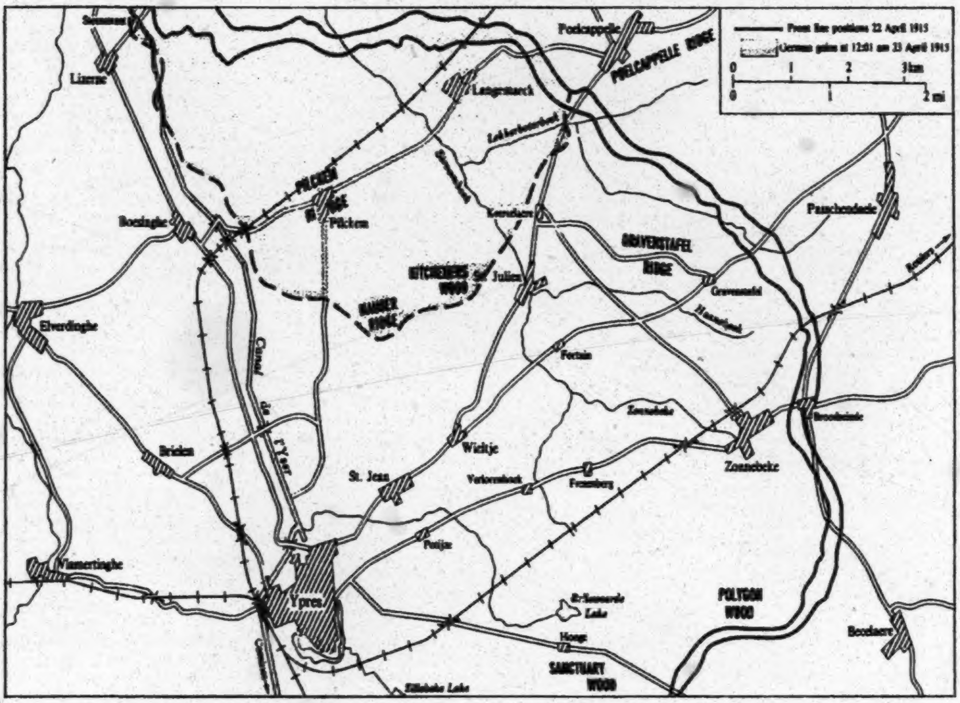
[7] Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson. Canadian Expeditionary Force: 1914-1919. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1964.) p 52.

[8] Nicholson, p 52.

It was in these conditions that the 2nd Brigade entered into in mid-April and quickly began reconstructing their new home along British standards.

Map 1


Front line positions 22 April 1915
German gains at 12:01 am 23 April 1915
0
1
2
3 km
0
1
2 mi
Lizerne
Poelcappelle
POELCAPPELLE RIDGE
Langemarck
Lekkerboterbeek
PILCKEM RIDGE
Pilckem
Boesinghe
Keerselaere
Passchendaele
GRAVENSTAFEL RIDGE
KITCHENERS WOOD
St. Julien
MAUSER RIDGE
Gravenstafel
Haanebeek
Elverdinghe
Canal de l'Yser
Fortuin
Zonnebeke
Broodseinde
Brielen
Wieltje
St. Jean
Verlorenhoek
Frezenberg
Zonnebeke
Potijze
Vlamertinghe
Ypres
Bellewaarde Lake
POLYGON WOOD
Hooge
Becelaere
SANCTUARY WOOD
Zillebeke Lake

[9]

Currie's Brigade took up position on the right wing of the 1st Division, with General Turner's 3rd Brigade occupying the left. Jack Hyatt writes, "Currie's Brigade was thoroughly warned of the impending [German] attack, but few preparations were made to meet it other than those already under way – namely, doing everything possible to strengthen the trenches taken over from the French."[10] Although Currie's Brigade may have been warned of the strong possibility of a German attack, senior British commanders did not take the threat seriously. Furthermore, information hinting that the Germans were intending to use gas in their attack was ignored.[11] The soldiers of the 2nd Brigade were doing everything they could to prepare their positions for an attack, but defence against gas was not given a priority by senior commanders and therefore not given a priority by junior commanders such as Currie. When the Germans attacked, the Canadians were prepared for a conventional fight. However, it was defence against gas that posed the major problem and for which they were the least prepared.

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[9] Map 1 courtesy of A.M.J. Hyatt. General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987. p 47.
[10] Hyatt, p 36.

On April 22nd at 5:00 p.m. the Germans released a cloud of chlorine gas and the first phase of the Second Battle of Ypres, known also as the Battle of Gravenstafel Ridge, began. As Currie reported, "About 4 p.m. the Germans violently bombarded the lines of the French to the North, also intervening territory violently as far south as St. Julien, other territory only intermittently. Soon I saw a great many French soldiers, a few of whom were wounded, come running past Report Centre from the North crying that all was lost and the Germans coming. I at once ordered the 7th Battalion to 'Stand to.'"[12] In these first hours of the attack, 2nd Brigade Headquarters received a confusing barrage of messages. Currie maintained his calm and attempted to derive a clear picture of the battle from the confusing reports.

Major confusion arose as to the disposition of the 3rd Brigade on Currie's left. The diary of operations for the 3rd Brigade reports, "By 6:30 p.m. great numbers of French were retiring towards Ypres passing in disorganized bodies through St. Julien and the country westwards. Bodies of the enemy were following in close pursuit."[13] Currie wrote that at 7 p.m. he, "Received word from 3rd Brigade that enemy were West of St. Julien and driving…"[14] The official history of the Canadian Corps reports that at around this time Gen. Alderson, commanding officer of 1st Canadian Division, received word that the Canadian left had been pushed back.[15]

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[11] See Hyatt, p 36 for a more detailed discussion.

[12] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary. April 1915. Library and Archives Canada. RG9, Series III-D-3, Volume 4870, Reel T-10668.

Sensing that the Canadian line needed to be strengthened Currie ordered his reserve Battalion, the 10th, forward to the front. At 7:15 p.m., after being informed that the 3rd Brigade had fallen back, Currie ordered the 10th Battalion to report to 3rd Brigade headquarters for reinforcement. At 7:25 p.m. Currie received orders from division headquarters to secure his left flank for fear that the 3rd Brigade had fallen back. Currie then ordered the 7th Battalion to take up a contact position with the 3rd Brigade's right, which they were successful in doing. At around 9:45 p.m. Currie, desperate to know what had happened to the Canadian left, requested a situation report from 3rd Brigade. No reply came. He became concerned about his left flank and was worried that the 3rd Brigade had been pushed back therefore creating a gap between the two Brigades. Finally, at around 11:05 p.m. he was informed that the 3rd Brigade occupied a continuous position and was preparing for a counter-attack. No gap existed and the Canadians were preparing to re-take their lost positions.

At close to midnight the 10th Battalion spearheaded a successful counter-attack against the German positions opposite the 3rd Brigade line in Kitchener's Wood. Currie reported that at the end of the day the 7th, 8th and 5th Battalions had all strengthened their lines and received ration and ammunition supplies. The situation was looking much better for the Canadians at the end of the day. The 10th Battalion had re-captured lost ground, the 3rd Brigade was positioned strongly on Currie's left and his own troops were relatively fresh. However, the German attacks on 23 April would once again test the resolve of the Canadian division.

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[13] 3rd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary. April 1915. RG9, Series III-D-3, Volume 4874, Reel T-10671-10672.
[14] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary. April 1915.
[15] Nicholson, p 59.

Although reassured that his flank was secure and that his Battalions were well supplied, the incessant rumbling of battle was still heard in the distance. Currie remained up through the night as the battle raged on and at 2:00 a.m. he received a request from 3rd Brigade for further reinforcements in the face of heavy enemy movement near St. Julien. Currie ordered three companies of the 7th Battalion to report to 3rd Brigade headquarters further diminishing his own strength. These requests for help made Currie feel uneasy about the position of 3rd Brigade. Currie wrote that he "verbally pointed out to 3rd Brigade the desirability of looking after their right flank; that 2nd Brigade could give no more help. Understood from conversation that their left flank had dropped back a little."[16] Currie had now committed all reserve troops to the maintenance of the 3rd Brigade sector.

The rest of the day was spent reconnoitering German positions and making sure that cohesion in the line was maintained between the 2nd and 3rd Brigades. At around 3:50 p.m. Currie was informed that the 7th Battalion was preparing their defences under heavy shelling and that Lt. Col HartMcHarg, commanding officer of 7th Battalion, believed that a German attack was imminent and furthermore that falling back might prove difficult due to the vulnerable position of the 3rd Brigade. However, HartMcHarg alleviated some of Currie's fears about his own position when he reported to Currie that he "is in pretty good shape having connected up with some reserve trenches."[17]

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[16] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary. April 1915.

At midnight, General Alderson, commanding officer of the 1st Canadian Division, reported that he was pleased with the situation. However, Currie's intuition was telling him otherwise when he wrote, "I was uneasy about the left and sent my Brigade Major (Lt. Col. Betty) to reconnoitre the line of 3rd Brigade right. He reported line more or less as described and 7th Battalion working very hard to improve position."[18] Currie believed HartMcHarg's assessment of the German situation and kept close contact with all units making sure he was fully aware of the placement of his troops if and when the Germans attacked. HartMcHarg was subsequently killed in action shortly after reporting to Currie.

24 April would prove the most harrowing day for Currie's 2nd Brigade. The strength of the Brigade had been diminished in Currie's efforts to support the 3rd Brigade. The 10th Battalion had been severely reduced in the counter-attack on Kitchener's Woods. Currie had lost the commanding officer of the 7th Battalion, Lt-Col. HartMcHarg. Furthermore, the commanding officer and second in command of the 10th Battalion, Lt-Col. Boyle and Major McLaren respectively, had both become casualties. Three companies of the 7th Battalion were engaged in defending off German attacks in 3rd Brigade's sector and the 10th Battalion was under the command of Brig. General Turner's 3rd Brigade and therefore not directly available to Currie. Currie's Brigade was spread out and under-strength on the morning of the 24th. It was in this state that his troops awaited the eventual German onslaught.

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[17] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.
[18] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

In the early hours of the morning Currie wrote, "the O.C. 8th Battalion reported the fumes drifting across from German lines to trenches 11 and 111. These fumes have an asphyxiating effect on the men. They become blue in the face and cannot breathe and soon become helpless."[19] The 2nd Brigade was under attack. Currie's biographer writes, "Here was a grave situation for the 2nd Brigade Commander. Currie had committed his reserves…on the 3rd Brigade front, and now the enemy had struck and penetrated…on the immediate left of Currie's own front line."[20] The Germans were attempting to punch through the defences between the 2nd and 3rd Brigade.

The 15th Battalion, defending the right flank of the 3rd Brigade, fell back in the face of the German offensive. This left the 8th Battalion, defending the 2nd Brigade's left flank, dangerously exposed. The German soldiers began working their way down the captured trenches towards 2nd Brigades flank but 8th Battalion, under Lt. Col. Lipsett, held strong. Currie realized the gravity of the situation and placed a company of 5th Battalion at the disposal of Lipsett's Battalion. Soon after, the 3rd Brigade sent 10th Battalion to Currie's aid but they were of little help as their, "strength was less than 200."[21]

The Germans had forced themselves past the forward defences of the 3rd Brigade and were threatening 8th Battalion from the rear. The position to the rear of 8th Battalion was labelled Locality C. Locality C was a tactical strong point defending the rear of the 2nd Brigade's flank and was crucial in the defence of the line. Currie, realizing the importance of this objective, sent 10th Battalion to reinforce Locality C. The situation was getting worse as the Germans were pressing on all sides of the forwardly exposed 2nd Brigade. The war diary entry for 5 a.m. describes the situation:

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[19] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.
[20] Urquhart, p 72.
[21] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

> The 8th Battalion were subjected to exactly the same bombardment as the 15th Battalion [3rd Brigade] but never left their trenches. O.C. 7th Battalion reported himself attacked and men of 15th Battalion had reported to him that they had been forced from their trenches by gas. The retirement of Highlanders [15th Battalion] exposed left of 8th Battalion and right of 7th Battalion [temporarily under commander of 3rd Brigade]. Capt. Warden O.C. No. 1 Coy, 7th Battalion in Locality 'C' also reported Highlanders falling back. [22]

Currie's Brigade had formed a small salient and was under extreme pressure from the attacking Germans. At 6:30 a.m. Currie sent a message to Division headquarters which stated, "Germans have broken through Highlanders trenches about 1000 yards left of Section 11 (8th Battalion) I regard the situation of the line…as critical. Can I get any reinforcements to report…to be used as necessary."[23] This last line would prove ominous, as the issue of reinforcements for the battle of St. Julien became a continual controversy throughout the battle.

The situation grew more dire by the minute. 3rd Brigade was slowly being pushed back, Currie had committed all his reserves in support of Locality C and 8th Battalion, and the tenuous hold on his front line would depend on the arrival of British reinforcements. Furthermore, at around 7 a.m. Currie's command post was hit by a shell and burnt to the ground. Luckily he and his staff escaped unharmed. Around 9 a.m., division headquarters informed Currie that two British Battalions – the York and Durham regiments – were being sent as reinforcements.

Map 2

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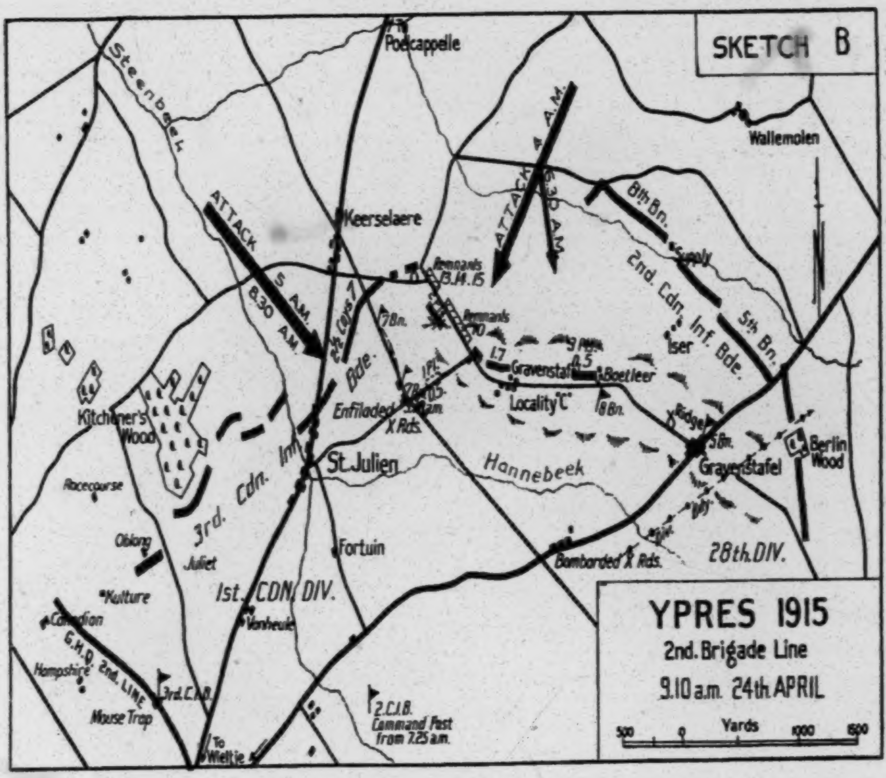
[22] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

[23] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary. April 1915.


SKETCH B
Poelcappelle
Steenbeek
Wallemolen
ATTACK 4 A.M.
5.30 A.M.
8th Bn.
Supply
2nd. Cdn. Inf. Bde.
5th Bn.
ATTACK 5 A.M. 8.30 A.M.
Keerselaere
Remnants 13.14.15
Remnants 7.10
2 1/2 Coys 7
7 Bn.
3 Hdts.
1.7
0.5
Gravenstafel
Boetleer
Iser
Locality "C"
8 Bn.
Ridge
5 Bn.
Gravenstafel
Berlin Wood
Kitchener's Wood
Enfiladed X Rds.
St. Julien
Hannebeek
3rd. Cdn. Inf. Bde.
Racecourse
Oblong
Juliet
Fortuin
Bombarded X Rds.
28th. DIV.
1st. CDN. DIV.
Kulture
Canadian
G.H.Q. 2nd. LINE
Hampshire
3rd. C.I.B.
Mouse Trap
Vanheule
To Wieltje
2. C.I.B. Command Post from 7.25 a.m.
YPRES 1915
2nd. Brigade Line
9.10 a.m. 24th. APRIL
Yards
500
0
1000
1500

[24]

With the news that these two Battalions were on their way Currie pressed the 3rd Brigade to counter-attack and retake their previous positions. At 9:10 a.m. Currie sent a message to Turner's Brigade asking Turner to, "Please inform me what steps you have taken to re-organize your right front?"[25] No reply came. At 10:50 a.m. Currie emphasized the point that Turner must reinforce his left flank in order to preserve the Gravenstafel Ridge. He concluded this message by asking, "What is your St. Julien garrison doing?"[26] Finally at 11:30 a.m. Turner responded by stating he had no reinforcements to counter-attack and therefore could not reform the line between 2nd and 3rd Brigade. Currie responded by stressing that "a local counter attack in the direction of

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[24] Map 2 courtesy of Hugh M. Urquhart. Arthur Currie: The Biography of a Great Canadian. Vancouver: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1950.
[25] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.
[26] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

St. Julien – D.7 will do much to restoring the situation. I would be glad if you would consider this and let me know your decision."[27] The fog of war had encapsulated the Canadian sector. Currie believed that two Battalions were on their way to 3rd Brigade headquarters and would arrive shortly, therefore affirming his belief that a counter-attack by the 3rd Brigade could be carried out successfully. Lipsett's 8th Battalion was under intense pressure. Defending Locality C, Major Odlum's 7th Battalion and remnants of the 10th Battalion were almost cut off from the 2nd Brigade. Currie realized that the lines had to be re-established otherwise they would not be able to hold off the Germans any longer.

Messages received around 12:30 p.m. informed Currie that a counter-attack employing the Durham and York Battalions was in preparation. In response to this, Currie ordered his Battalion commanders to hold their positions at all costs. However, the counter-attack did not materialize. Confusion had permeated division headquarters, 3rd Brigade headquarters, as well as the headquarters of the subordinate units. In the 2nd Brigade war diary Currie wrote that at 12:30 p.m. "I received copy of message addressed to 3rd Inf. Bde. Stating that Two Battalions of York and Durham Bde. are placed at your disposal for a counter attack to restore situation on your right…The attack must be energetically pushed…"[28] However, 3rd Brigade's war diary noted, "Instructions were also received that these Battalions [York and Durham] should not be used unless absolutely necessary. Consequently, when these Battalions, the 5th Durhams and the 4th Yorks reported, they were ordered to prolong the unoccupied G.H.Q. line east of the St. Julien-Ypres road."[29] Currie and Turner were obviously not under the same assumptions concerning the reinforcements. Currie believed them to be intended for a general counter-attack, whereas Turner believed them to be for strengthening the 3rd Brigade line.

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[27] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.
[28] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.
[29] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

It was here Currie made a bold decision, "I left Report Centre and went to G.H.Q. line to get in touch with this counter attacking force, point out the situation to them and direct them."[30] For a commander to leave his headquarters in the middle of a battle is a risky manoeuvre. Currie had to trust all the major decisions to his second in command Lt. Col. Kemmis-Betty. If Kemmis-Betty made a poor decision, or if disaster struck the Brigade, Currie would take the blame. Not only would he be responsible, but to be absent from his headquarters when disaster struck would most likely be grounds for dismissal. Currie must have understood the possible consequences, yet still chose to leave in order to gather reinforcements. Understanding Currie's mentality at the time is difficult, but he obviously weighed the importance of gathering reinforcements over the risk of leaving his headquarters. Furthermore, he must have had immense trust in Kemmis-Betty's ability.

Before leaving, Currie informed Lt. Col. Lipsett of 8th Battalion that if necessary he might withdraw. Currie's reasoning for this lay in the fact that Turner's Brigade had withdrawn and therefore, "…the whole flank of the 2nd Bde. From the G.H.Q. line to the left of Section 11 (nearly 4,000 yards) was entirely exposed…"[31] This was a very dangerous situation for Currie's Brigade as they could have been cut off from the main line. Furthermore, the Germans could exploit the gap between the 2nd and 3rd Brigade penetrating the Canadian line of defence. Lipsett informed Currie that he believed his 8th

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[30] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.
[31] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

Battalion could hold their exposed position. For that reason alone Currie left the decision to withdraw up to Lipsett.

Currie's sortie to find reinforcements proved unsuccessful, rounding up about 100 men from 2nd Brigade and sending them in support of 8th Battalion. He reported that when he found the York and Durham regiments, "An officer of 3rd Brigade staff said a message had been received to cancel the counter-attack."[32] Currie realized first hand the precarious position his Brigade was in. Believing that reinforcements were on their way Currie's Brigade had held out against the Germans, while Turner's 3rd Brigade withdrew believing that the reinforcements were intended to strengthen the newly formed rear position.

After hearing this news, Currie decided to continue in his search for reinforcements. He ventured towards the headquarters of 27th division, under General Snow, who was in charge of all units in the corps reserve. Under constant artillery fire throughout his journey, Currie arrived near the town of Wieltje to request assistance from Snow. Currie reported that when he explained the immediate need for reinforcements Snow berated him for leaving the front line and refused to support him. Currie hurried back to his headquarters dumbfounded at the treatment he had received from General Snow.[33]

Currie returned to his headquarters at around 11 p.m. surprised at General Snow's reaction to his request and highly concerned about his Brigades worsening position. Credit must be given to Lt. Col. Kemmis-Betty who was able to form a clear picture of the battlefield in Currie's absence and maintain contact between 2nd and 3rd Brigade. By the end of the evening the situation on the front line was highly confusing; Battalions and divisions were mixed up with each other, soldiers were unclear as to where they were supposed to go and whom to report to, and headquarters of the 1st Canadian Division, 3rd Brigade and 2nd Brigade were unclear as to each other's positions. However, by midnight the 2nd Brigade held their position in the exposed salient even in the face of repeated German attacks and negligible reinforcements. Lipsett's 8th Battalion and remnants of Major Odlum's 7th Battalion and 10th Battalion protected Currie's left flank while the 5th defended Currie's right.

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[32] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

[33] Tim Travers. Currie and the 1st Canadian Division at Second Ypres April 1915: Controversy, Criticism and Official History. Canadian Military History 5, no. 2 (autumn 1996) p 7-15.

At any point throughout the day Currie could have ordered a general withdrawal. Believing that his position could be maintained, and that reinforcements were on their way, Currie refused to order a general retreat. The fact that the 2nd Brigade held their positions in the face of concentrated German attacks speaks to the skill which Currie, and to some extent Kemmis-Betty and the Battalion commanders, handled the Brigade. He trusted his subordinate officers when they told him they could hold their positions even though the arrival of reinforcements was dubious. It was Turner's 3rd Brigade that had placed Currie's men in such a vulnerable position. The next day this position would have to stand up to more German assaults.

Throughout the night efforts were made to strengthen the line. By the morning, of the 25th, these efforts were "so successful…that by dawn of the 25th the 2nd Brigade front had become reasonably strong."[34] Even though the line had been strengthened, Currie's Brigade was severely weakened by repeated German attacks and extremely vulnerable due to the small salient they held in the Canadian line. The Germans were moving around the rear of the 2nd Brigade with only remnants of the 7th and 10th Battalions holding them back at Locality C. A battered 8th Battalion reinforced the left flank while a dug in 5th Battalion held the right flank of the 2nd Brigade. Several shattered companies of the 10th Battalion filled in various spots throughout the line and as dawn broke the Germans could be seen massing for another attack. Currie, his staff and his Brigade were exhausted, yet somehow he was able to maintain discipline and his troops steeled themselves for yet another German attack.

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[34] Urquhart, p 95.

At this point in the battle, with the 2nd Brigade holding a vulnerable salient and the Germans pressing to encircle his troops, Currie's best option might have been a withdrawal. However, early in the morning on the 25th Currie was informed that the British 10th Brigade was going to launch a counter-attack in order to re-take the trenches previously held. With this information, Currie understood that his Brigade must hold their position in order to prevent the 10th Brigade from being cut off in case they succeeded. At 7:35 am he recorded in his war diary, "I found the men of the 8th, 10th and 7th Battalion very very tired with the sixty hours of fighting…"[35] Currie knew they had to hang on.

The 10th Brigade advanced under heavy machine gun and rifle fire but with limited artillery support failed to reach their objective. Currie wrote,

> At 10:20 am 10th Infantry Brigade reported that counter attack on St. Julien was unsuccessful… I realized the seriousness of predicament of 2nd Brigade when 1st Brigade did not join up on our left and when a force of the size which General Hull (C.O. 10th Brigade) commanded failed in its attack on St. Julien, moreover the men were so tired, the rifle, machine gun fire and shell fire was terrific while no artillery support could be got.[36]

It was here that the situation rapidly began to deteriorate. At 12:40 pm Currie wrote, "Major Odlum in charge of 10th and 7th on left says it is imperative to arrange attack to clear left front. We can only hang on…Where are 1st Brigade units? See nothing of them on our left."[37] The 1st Brigade reinforcements were actually under the command of General Turner and his 3rd Brigade, who was holding the G.H.Q. line in the rear. On learning this Currie wrote, "I knew then that my left was right in the air."[38] It is around this time that Currie began to address the idea of a withdrawal.

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[35] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.
[36] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

He sent several messages to his Battalion commanders stressing that they must hold "at least to night without fail."[39] A withdrawal in broad daylight would have been a disaster. The Germans would witness the manoeuvre and order an assault against a retreating enemy. Nightfall was the only plausible time for the 2nd Brigade to fall back. Currie spent the rest of the afternoon continually requesting reinforcements. At 3 pm, he was informed that the Germans were massing for a counter-attack. This led to a flurry of messages inquiring into any available reinforcements. Two companies of the Durham Battalion, about 150 men, arrived the night before to relieve an area occupied by the 8th Battalion. However, these reinforcements were not enough to aid the 2nd Brigade in defence of another German attack. In fact, the two Durham companies actually withdrew around 4 p.m. when Currie needed them most. Currie's frustration with the lack of support can be clearly seen in his message written at 4:20 pm, "Two companies of Durhams who relieved 8th in Sections Two A & B evacuated for little reason. Section 11 A also left because their flank was exposed. Have no troops to make counter attack as

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[37] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.
[38] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.
[39] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

Durhams won't stand. Left flank also dropped back."[40] It was shortly after this message that Currie gave the order to withdraw at dusk.

Under the cover of darkness the 2nd Brigade fell back west of Gravenstafel ridge and St. Julien. The 7th Battalion boldly defended the Brigade's rear finally making it back to the new line early on the morning of the 26th under the cover of a morning mist. The Brigade held this new line while continuing to incur casualties, including Lt. Col. Kemmis-Betty, until they were relieved on the night of the 27th. One of the most harrowing battles the 2nd Brigade would ever face had now come to a close.

Any examination of the development of Arthur Currie's command capability must start with his actions during the 2nd Battle of Ypres. Firstly, an analysis of Currie's leadership must be conducted. This was his first significant engagement where the enemy directly pressed his lines. Throughout the battle Currie maintained his composure in the face of ever-increasing odds. His field messages rarely betrayed any sense of panic or frustration. Only by the end of the battle does one get a sense that Currie was frustrated with the reinforcement situation. However, Currie's field messages showed a continual calm as well as a relatively accurate understanding of the situation on the front.

The gas attack by the Germans was unprecedented on the Western Front and many commanders in Currie's position could have made hasty tactical decisions resulting in disaster. The use of gas panicked the soldiers into retreat and only a steady and composed commander could carry them through the horrors of gas warfare. A comparison between Gen. Turner's 3rd Brigade and Gen. Currie's 2nd Brigade can shed some light on Currie's competence during this battle. Both Brigades were heavily engaged on the 24 and 25 of April, yet Currie was able to maintain his Brigade's position.

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[40] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

General Turner's 3rd Brigade fell back in the face of the German onslaught leaving Currie's 2nd Brigade dangerously vulnerable. Currie's insistence on understanding the situation on his left flank stands out; especially due to the lack of response from 3rd Brigade headquarters concerning its actual disposition. Currie continually pressed 3rd Brigade for a counter-attack to restore the situation yet Turner withdrew and consolidated a new line to the rear of 2nd Brigade.

Currie was constantly moving between the different Battalion headquarters in order to get a first hand account of the situation each Battalion faced. Major Odlum of the 7th Battalion described Currie's involvement at the Battalion level, "About 1:30 a.m. on the 25th of April Brigadier General Currie personally came to the G.H.Q. 2nd line and took command of what were left of the 7th and 10th Battalions. This composite unit moved under his orders…to protect the exposed left of the 8th Battalion."[41] This is a perfect example of, how through direct involvement with his Battalions, Currie was able to prevent his Brigade from being over-run. This hands-on approach kept Currie informed and in control of the situation. Furthermore, all the rear positions including the Battalion and Brigade headquarters were under constant German artillery fire. Currie ignored this danger and travelled constantly throughout these secondary positions sharing the same horrors as the men he commanded.

Currie's leadership was undoubtedly solid but his tactical decisions must be analyzed in order to fully understand Currie's role in this battle. The over riding question when reviewing the battle of St. Julien is whether or not Currie should have withdrawn earlier in order to set up a solid defensive line with the new position of the 3rd Brigade.

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[41] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. Report of 7th Battalion, April 22nd to 27th 1915. Library and Archives Canada. RG9, Series III-D-3, Volume 4870, Reel T-10668.

This may have been a prudent solution. It is possible that a more experienced commander would have recognized immediately the vulnerability of the 2nd Brigade's small salient and ordered an organized withdrawal. A less composed commander when faced with the same isolated position of the 2nd Brigade might have panicked, resulting in a chaotic retreat.

Currie's insistence on holding the front can be directly related to his initial beliefs that reinforcements were on their way. Numerous times throughout the battle Currie stressed the need for reinforcements. At 1 pm on the 24th he was informed that two Battalions were on their way intended for a counter-attack. At 3 pm on the 25th Currie was informed that reinforcements were once again on their way. Both times these reinforcements failed to show. That fault falls primarily on the shoulders of the division commander General Alderson who failed to maintain consistency in his messages to the 3rd and 2nd Brigade. Even when he realized reinforcements were not on their way, Currie felt that the original line could be re-established. He pleaded with General Turner to organize a counter-attack and held his Brigade in position in order to support any such counter-attack. It was only at the very end of the battle, when he realized that there would be no help in restoring the original line, that Currie finally withdrew his brigade.

Furthermore, Currie made a significant decision when he sent the 10th Battalion to aid the 3rd Brigade in the early stages of the battle of St. Julien. Instead of waiting for a request for help from the 3rd Brigade, which already could have been too late, he sent the 10th Battalion immediately on learning that the 3rd Brigade was defending against a heavy German assault. Although this move hurt him later in the battle when 2nd Brigade came under direct assault, Turner's 3rd Brigade was able to prevent a complete rout and held on long enough to provide stiff resistance and then execute an orderly withdrawal.

Another aspect of his command that needs to be addressed is his decision to leave his headquarters in order to secure reinforcements. This decision has become a minor controversy, and there has been some historiographical debate as to why it was not mentioned in Duguid's official history.[42] What needs to be examined is the decision by a commander to leave his headquarters in the middle of a battle in order to seek reinforcements. The problem here is two fold. Firstly, Currie had to trust all command decisions to Lt. Col. Kemmis-Betty. Secondly, if Kemmis-Betty was to make a poor decision or disaster was to strike the 2nd Brigade, Currie would not be available to make a timely decision. Although Currie was unable to secure any sufficient reinforcements, no disaster occurred and Kemmis-Betty conducted himself well. However, this is only in hindsight. If the Germans had broken through while Currie was absent from headquarters he would have likely lost his command in the aftermath. More importantly, it is imperative that a commander maintains continual contact with all his units during a battle. By leaving his headquarters Currie cut himself out of the information loop and left important command decisions to a subordinate officer. The decision by Currie to leave his headquarters can be attributed to his lack of experience in combat situations. This was not a panicked decision; however, it was an inexperienced decision and one that could have resulted in disaster and possibly the end of Currie's career. Although his intention was honourable and what he perceived to be in the best interests of his Brigade, it was not the appropriate decision for a commander to make at that point in the battle.

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[42] It is not the intention to discuss the historiographical controversy here. For a better understanding of this controversy one can read Tim Travers' article, Currie and the 1st Canadian Division at Second Ypres April 1915: Controversy, Criticism and Official History.

He should have remained at headquarters and relied on a subordinate to carry out the task. If Currie was injured or killed, his headquarters would not have known about it. Furthermore, if the Germans broke through the Canadian line, Currie would not have been around to conduct a proper withdrawal and his Brigade might have been completely routed.

In the wake of this operation Currie deduced some very important lessons. The first significant lesson was the need for an available body of reinforcements. Throughout the battle of St. Julien, Currie continually requested reinforcements. Very few reinforcements arrived and those that did were insufficient to repel the German attacks. It is the lack of reinforcements that caused Currie the most frustration during this operation.

A second major lesson that Currie took from this battle was the continual failure of counter-attacks against German positions. He specifically referred to the counter-attack by General Hull's force on St. Julien: "the men were so tired, the rifle, machine-gun fire and shell fire was terrific while no artillery support could be got."[43] Currie addressed two important factors here. Firstly, soldiers cannot make a successful counter-attack when they have been exhausted through continual fighting. Fresh troops are necessary for any counter-attack. The second factor is that there must be artillery support for any attack. The attack failed mainly because artillery could not be brought to bear on the German defences. Currie spent much of his time as a Brigade and division commander emphasizing these two points. Troops intended for any attack must be fresh and the artillery support must be adequate.

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[43] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary April 1915.

One of the consistent elements in Currie's command was his concern for the equipment of his men. After Neuve Chapelle, Currie realized the impotence of the Ross Rifle in trench warfare. After the battle of St. Julien, Currie released a report condemning the Colt machine gun and requesting the replacement of it with the Maxim. He cited four primary faults with the Colt: the tripod was too cumbersome and heavy therefore making it less mobile, the weapon jammed frequently, and that the weapon was too exposed leaving it vulnerable to being choked with dirt. However, what stands out in his report is the fourth and final fault with the gun, "The most serious aspect of the case to my mind is that the men appear to have lost all confidence in the weapon."[44] This report is once again an example of Currie's concern with the equipment being used by his men. It is obvious that the most important factor in his mind was that the soldiers themselves must be confident with the equipment being used. Currie used the experience of the battlefield to draw conclusions about what type of equipment he wanted his men to employ.

What needs to be understood when analyzing all aspects of the battle of Second Ypres is that Currie had never been in any situation similar to this. He had no experience to draw upon. His actions at Neuve Chapelle were in a supporting role, whereas at St. Julien he was thrust into the central role. Many soldiers fall apart in their first experience of battle yet Currie remained composed throughout. He was under constant shellfire and at one point his headquarters suffered a direct hit. During his time attempting to gather reinforcements, he risked continual artillery fire traveling between various headquarters. He was not afraid to move closer to the front line as described by Major Odlum. His actions during this battle are remarkable for a man who only a year before had been a militia officer in Victoria. The 2nd Brigade war diary showcases the composure Currie maintained throughout the battle, the clear understanding of the events surrounding him and the confidence he had in his subordinates. The battle of 2nd Ypres played a major role in the development stage of Currie's command philosophy. It was during this operation that his calm demeanour, understanding of the battlefield and insistence on post-action analysis provided him with some fundamental elements of his developing command philosophy. Curric had received his first serious lesson in warfare in the chaotic classroom that was the battle of Second Ypres.

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[44] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. Report on the Replacement of Colt Automatic Machine Gun by the Maxim. May 1st 1915. Library and Archives Canada. RG9, Series III-D-3, Volume 4870, Reel T-10668.

1.3 Battle of Festubert – May 1915

The Battle of Festubert in May of 1915 was part of a general allied offensive intended to strike deep into German-held territory. General Haig believed that German manpower and industrial power were waning and therefore vulnerable to a large offensive. The planned offensive had two attack phases, both intended to drive the Germans back from their well-fortified positions. Currie's Brigade participated in the first phase of the attack, a combined Franco-British assault. The French would strike the Germans in the Artois sector and the British would assist them by attacking just north of the French sector.

The 2nd Brigade was brought into the line on 19 May after the offensive had already been launched. On arrival, Currie was given a wholly inadequate map to use in the operation. His Brigade was ordered to attack an objective labelled K.5. The trench map handed to Currie had K.5, along with every other topographical feature and German position, represented by a circle. The problem was artillery in that area had virtually destroyed all noticeable features on the landscape. K.5 could no more be discerned than any other objective on the map. The map itself was upside down, with north on the bottom of the map and south at the top. With this lack of clarity as to the objective of the 2nd Brigade Currie "advised Divisional Headquarters that the operation be postponed until a thorough reconnaissance of the approaches to the objective and the objective itself be made."[45] Currie needed to clarify exactly what the Canadians were facing as the map given to Currie lacked any of this information. Currie's recommendation was ignored and the attack was to commence as scheduled.

The attack on the position known as K.5 was a poorly planned, frontal assault on German positions that failed to capture the objective and resulted in high casualties. The 2nd Brigade climbed out of their trenches and began their straight forward advance towards an unidentifiable objective while German machine gun and rifle fire cut into their ranks. Even Currie wrote, "the attack was a complete failure."[46] He made several criticisms as to why the attack failed. He began by stating that no "previous reconnaissance of the enemy's position had been carried out."[47] This was Currie's biggest complaint prior to the attack and was the main reason why he believed it should have been postponed. Concerning the artillery's role in the battle Currie stated, "the bombardment...had been quite ineffectual."[48] He further lamented the fact that while his troops were assembling in their trenches prior to the attack they were in full view of the enemy and subject to harassing fire. Finally he pointed out that, "The only approach to K.5 was through a narrow communication trench swept by the enemy's machine guns, the leading men of the front company were all shot down."[49] Currie had obviously foreseen the difficulties in the plans for the attack on K.5. Although he recommended postponement of the attack, Currie was ignored and disaster ensued.

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[45] Urquhart, p 106.

[46] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary. May 1915. RG9, Series III-D-3, Volume 4870, Reel T-10668.

[47] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary May 1915.

[48] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary May 1915.

A second attack was scheduled for the 24th and this time Currie was to make sure his troops had the best possible advantages while attacking. After the failed attack on the 20th, the Canadian trenches were extended and reinforced as to afford protection to all the assembling troops moving through the communication trenches. Currie ordered a reconnaissance party to thoroughly scout the area prior to the attack. Once again an artillery barrage would precede the attack. Still, the same problem persisted concerning the identification of K.5. A series of redoubts dotted the area of the Canadian attack and it became difficult for Currie's men to locate the specific objective. Nonetheless, the attack went through and although still under heavy German machine gun fire the lead elements of the 2nd Brigade were able to occupy a portion of what they perceived to be K.5. These troops were forced to dig in and defend against a series of German counter-attacks and fierce artillery bombardments. They were finally relieved on the night of the 24th.

What is interesting about this second operation is the observation Currie made about the use of artillery during an attack, "I wish to digress here to point out that my experience justifies me in the conclusion that after an attack on enemy trenches, if these are to be held, our artillery must be prepared to engage the enemy's artillery at once. Firing on the enemy's trenches is not as effectual in keeping down hostile artillery fire.

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[49] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary May 1915.

Normally it may be, but not when the enemy are putting forth every effort to expel you from trenches you have captured."[50] Following up this point he wrote, "Both on Saturday the 22nd and on the 24th our troops suffered severely from our own artillery fire and I consider F.O.O.'s [forward observation officers] do not get close enough to the front."[51] The battle of Festubert had ended for Currie's 2nd Brigade with enormous cost and once again Currie took from this operation a series of valuable lessons

The attack on K.5 was a small action in a larger operation yet it was the first time Currie's Brigade had gone on the offensive and therefore gave Currie some valuable lessons. Currie realized how important thorough reconnaissance of an objective was in order for a successful attack to take place. He requested a postponement of the first attack until further information concerning the topography around K.5 as well as German positions could be clarified. This request was declined and the attack failed. Before the second attack Currie ordered a thorough reconnaissance in order to prevent a similar disaster.

Furthermore, Currie realized first hand the uselessness of the maps being used. The objectives were all labelled as circles disregarding any sort of topographical differences between them. Because of this, the location of K.5 was obscure as there were several possible positions in the area that the Canadians could have mistaken as K.5. Only late in the second attack did Currie finally get confirmation that his men had taken K.5.

Finally, Currie pointed out the ineffectual role artillery played in the support of the infantry's attack. Prior to the first attack the artillery barrage failed to damage the

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[50] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary May 1915.
[51] 2nd Can. Infantry Brigade. War Diary May 1915.

German defences. During the second attack the artillery failed in a support role once the objective was actually taken. Currie even pointed out how his Brigade suffered casualties under their own artillery fire.

The battle of Festubert became Currie's last significant action as commander of the 2nd Brigade. He had gone from a militia officer granted a command through Sam Hughs' patronage system, to proving himself as an able and adept commander. Currie's command philosophy was developed during these formative months of combat and he set the tone for a leadership style that would continue until the end of the war. Currie shared the dangers of the men, never shirking away from the front line or placing his headquarters so far in the rear that he became out of touch with front line realities. He was close enough to the front line that during the battle of 2nd Ypres his headquarters took a direct artillery hit. During this battle he travelled through a German artillery storm trying to gather up reinforcements. Currie ignored the dangers of the battlefield in order to get to Battalion headquarters to ascertain a clearer picture of the front line. In some situations, like his excursion to gather up reinforcements, Currie went above and beyond what was expected of him, putting his life on the line in an unsuccessful bid to find more troops for his weakening Battalions.

This disregard for personal safety also allowed Currie to maintain tight control over his Brigade during their actions. At 2nd Ypres there are numerous reports of Currie arriving at Battalion headquarters in order to clarify the situation at the front. He maintained his composure even at the most pressing times, sending out a constant flow of messages to all units in and surrounding his Brigade in order to know where everybody was on the battlefield. When Currie did not receive a reply to his message he would send another more pressing note explaining the situation in more exact details. His messages late in the battle of St. Julien showed a sense of frustration at the lack of response from many units. Currie knew that he could not successfully command his Brigade without the best possible knowledge of the battlefield situation.

Another aspect of Currie's leadership that stands out during these operations is his concern for the men. He did not want his men fighting with equipment they lacked confidence in. His reports on the Ross Rifle and Colt Machine Gun show this concern. Currie understood that his troops could not fight well if morale was suffering due to the knowledge that faulty equipment was being used. Unfortunately it took the realities of the battlefield to render this conclusion, not any pre-battle testing. Currie did not ignore these signs like other commanders may have; he trusted the reports he received from his subordinates and combined with his own judgement rendered his decision.

Furthermore, Currie realized the necessity of being prepared for every operation. Currie requested that the attack on K.5 be postponed until further reconnaissance could be done on the position. He realized how futile it was for an attack to take place on an objective that had not even been properly located. At Festubert, German machine gun nests were not located or neutralized. These positions destroyed his troops during the first attack on K.5. In the second attack on the objective, Currie ordered an extensive reconnaissance and his Brigade made much more significant gains.

Although Currie had enjoyed extensive tactical training prior to entering into the front lines, nothing was to prepare him for the realities of trench warfare. There were several very important tactical lessons Currie ascertained from these operations. Firstly, artillery support had to be more effective in support of the infantry's attack. He commented at both St. Julien and Festubert about the inadequate artillery barrages. Not only did Currie recognize the inadequacy of artillery but he bemoaned their lack of effectiveness once gains had been made. At Festubert, he pointed out that the artillery must be prepared to engage in counter-battery fire once enemy trenches have been taken. During the first attack on K.5 those elements of 2nd Brigade that made it into the enemy trenches were destroyed by German artillery fire. Currie had not provided a solution to the artillery problem, but he recognized that there had to be some changes in the method in which artillery was employed on the battlefield.

The siege-like warfare that permeated the western front led many commanders to rethink concepts of trench warfare. Currie issued an order for 29 July 1915 outlining the basic tenets of occupying the front line. His first point ordered that "there are sufficient sentries posted in the front line trenches by day, viz: at least one sentry to every three bays of the trench." His second order was that "the garrison of the front line trenches always wear their equipment, less packs." His final order stated, "bayonets are always fixed."[52] Although these can be considered minor points, it showed that Currie had quickly caught on to life in the trenches. He understood that a German attack could come at any time and that the front trenches should likewise be prepared to receive it. Currie employed routine trench inspections to make sure that his orders were being followed.

At St. Julien, Currie realized the need for a readily available supply of reinforcements. Throughout the battle he continued to demand reinforcements yet received very few. Currie realized the importance of having an available reserve to use in counter-attacking positions captured by the Germans. He understood that by capturing

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[52] Arthur Currie. Report on Trench Discipline 29 July, 1915. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of the 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. RG9 111 C-3, boxes 4006 to 4022.

Canadian positions the Germans in turn made themselves vulnerable to a powerful counter-attack. He stressed this point to Gen. Turner's 3rd Brigade arguing that a counter-attack could have pushed the Germans out of St. Julien as they had made themselves vulnerable while capturing the village.

The lessons of the battlefields of Neuve-Chapelle, St. Julien and Festubert had quickly transformed Currie from an inexperienced militia officer into a battle-hardened brigadier general. Currie soaked up lessons from these early operations. He implemented certain tactical initiatives and altered specific elements of his command philosophy after every operation. There were still more lessons to be learned but Currie's concept of warfare on the western front was being shaped. The development stage of his command philosophy was coming to an end, and very soon he would begin refining this philosophy into a successful battlefield prescription. He did not have the professional training of so many of his colleagues but instead used his common sense and discerning mind to understand the events around him. When analyzing these early battles there is a confident tone in Currie's actions. Currie was not afraid to point out aspects of the fighting which did not facilitate better efficiency. He kept a tight watch on his subordinates and was in constant communication with his superior officers.

The actions during these early operations eventually granted Currie recognition. In September of 1915 he recorded in his diary, "Go to Div. Headquarters to see the General, who takes off blue band and puts on red. Cable home to mother."[53] The red armband was the sign of a major-general and Currie had just been promoted to command the First Division.

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[53] Arthur Currie. Diary entry, September 1915. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.

Part 2: Division Commander

2.1 New Responsibilities

In September of 1915 Arthur Currie was promoted to command the 1st Canadian Division. The difference in commanding the 1st Division as opposed to the 2nd Brigade was immense. As Jack Hyatt notes, "The change in scale was substantial – and unfamiliar…The task was the most challenging he had ever faced."[1] The 2nd Brigade consisted of three thousand to four thousand men primarily intended as available rifle strength. The 1st Canadian Division contained approximately fifteen to eighteen thousand men occupying a variety of roles including three infantry Brigades as well as its own cavalry, artillery, engineers, medical services and logistical support services.[2] The size and complexity of the 1st Canadian Division meant that Currie would have at his disposal a large variety of specialized units to employ in any operation. Not only was the elaborate make up of the division a daunting challenge for Currie to adapt to, but he now had to oversee a battlefield three to four times larger than that of his 2nd Brigade. The sheer size of the 1st Division meant that every decision Currie made would have larger ramifications than that of the 2nd Brigade. Furthermore, each decision he made would be carried out on a larger more complicated scale.[3]

Currie soon faced his first administrative obstacle as commander of the 1st Division. Although Currie was Canadian, and proud of the Canadian character of his troops, he would not let nationalistic sentiment affect the efficient running of his division. The infamous minister of militia Sir Sam Hughes was placing increasing pressure on

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[1] Hyatt, p 49.
[2] Hyatt, p 49.
[3] At this time in the war Canadian and British divisions were similarly organized. In 1918 the British set about reorganizing their divisional structure due to decreasing man power but the Canadian divisional structure remained the same.

Canadian commanders to appoint Canadian officers to any available positions. Now in command of the 1st Division, Currie had a number of staff appointments to fill. Hughes naturally demanded that Canadians fill these positions and began pressuring all Canadian commanders to abide. However, Currie felt that it was not a matter of being Canadian or British, but being the best man for the job. He argued that many Canadian officers lacked the experience and training required to properly fill the available roles within his staff. In December of 1915 Currie responded to this pressure by writing, "I desire to state that in my opinion no Imperial officer in this Division could at present be replaced by a Canadian officer now serving, and available, without great loss of efficiency."[4] For Currie, the importance of efficiently running the 1st Division outweighed any nationalistic overtones.[5]

Currie took over his role as commander of the 1st Division with the same studious intensity he had when in command of the 2nd Brigade. For example, in October Currie inspected 1st Brigades trench system and found the entire network to be insufficient. He immediately issued instructions to 1st Brigade headquarters to construct a series of new trenches as well as reinforce the support trenches and the wiring systems.[6] Currie understood that he needed to learn as much as possible about his job and about the men surrounding him. He was constantly meeting with subordinate officers absorbing as much information as possible. Currie knew that in order to become a good commander he had to learn as much about his trade as possible. He further understood that it was imperative that he come to know and understand the subordinate officers surrounding him. For the rest of the year the 1st Division was fortunate enough to be kept out of any heavy engagements. But, by June of 1916 the 'quiet period' for the 1st Division would come to an end and Currie was to be put to the test.

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[4] Arthur Currie. Letter to Canadian Corps Headquarters, December 11th 1915. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.
[5] Hyatt, p 52.
[6] Arthur Currie. Letter to 1st Brigade Headquarters, October 11th 1915. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.

2.2 The Battle of Mount Sorrel, June 1916

In June of 1916 the 1st Division held a position alongside the 2nd and 3rd Canadian divisions that together made up the most easterly portion of the Allied controlled Ypres salient. The Canadian position obtruded heavily into German territory and the 3rd Division occupied the only remaining portion of the geographically dominant Ypres ridge. This ridge included a series of hills known as Mount Sorrel, Tor Top and Observatory Ridge. Facing the Canadians were the 27th and 26th Divisions of the 13th Wurttemberg Corps. On 2 June German troops initiated an attack that came to be known as the Battle of Mount Sorrel. If the Germans could occupy Mount Sorrel and Tor Top, positions held by the 3rd Division, then capture Observatory Ridge, they would be able to observe all Allied movement in the Ypres salient. The capture of these positions would essentially force a complete Allied withdrawal from the entire salient.

For the 1st Canadian Division the Battle of Mount Sorrel unfolded in two phases. The first phase was the defence against the initial German attack on 2 June, the second phase being the counter-attack on 13 June. On the morning of 2 June the Germans unleashed an artillery barrage followed by waves of attacking infantry that made considerable gains in the first hours of the attack. They captured Mount Sorrel and Tor Top and began methodically working their way down Observatory Ridge. During this initial assault, a gap was opened in the Canadian line and Currie ordered the corps reserve to fill this opening. As Nicholson writes, "By evening of 2 June machine guns of the 10th Battalion and batteries of the Motor Machine Gun Brigade sent forward by G.O.C. 1st Division [Currie] had established a new line sealing off the German encroachment."[7] What is important to note here is that Currie was not in command of the corps reserve, but he saw the impending disaster that could result from a breach in the Canadian line and sent reserve units forward in order to seal the gap and prevent a German breakthrough. It was this initiative that prevented a wholesale rout. The Germans had taken a significant portion of the Canadian line and began to consolidate their new positions. Corps commander Sir Julian Byng ordered the 1st Division to counter-attack and recapture the lost positions on Mount Sorrel and Tor Top.

The second phase of the 1st Divisions role in the Battle of Mount Sorrel took place on 13 June. The Germans had achieved considerable gains in their first attack and British army commander General Plumer wanted them expelled. However, preparations were already well underway for the Somme offensive and General Haig, British Commander in Chief, did not want to divert too many troops to the assistance of the Canadian counter-attack. He did, however, make available a large amount of reserve artillery to be used in conjunction with the attack.

General Currie's 1st Division was assigned the task of regaining Mount Sorrel and Tor Top. Currie's Operation Order No. 78 laid out a specific operational outline for the attack and as Urquhart writes, "It was the first occasion on which Currie played a part in the directing of the new war machine."[8] What this means is that it was the first time

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[7] Nicholson, p 134.

[8] Urquhart, p 129.

Currie played a major role in the planning of a significant offensive operation. The first thing to notice in Currie's operational outline is his detailed artillery plan. He ordered that on the 11th and 12th artillery barrages be directed against various parts of the German works.[9] This conformed to the standard practices of the time. A softening up barrage was often unleashed in the immediate days preceding the attack intended to weaken the enemy's trench network creating gaps in the wire, destroying machine gun nests and inflicting casualties. The success of these preparatory barrages was dubious. Artillery explosives up to this point in the war were still relatively ineffective in destroying wire and enemy fortifications. They were primarily successful in causing enemy casualties, but once in their dugouts troops were relatively protected.

Currie's division had been weakened in the previous weeks of fighting and he was forced to create two composite Brigades labeled the left and right Brigade under General Lipsett and General Tuxford, respectively. Currie also put together a reserve Brigade under General Garnet Hughes. Currie designated the objectives for the left Brigade as two geographical features known as Hill 60 and Hill 62 while right Brigade would take Mount Sorrel. He ordered that both Brigades would attack on a three Battalion frontage keeping one Battalion in reserve. A detailed artillery plan was laid out: the artillery would commence firing on the captured Canadian trenches at 1 am; at 1:10 am the artillery on the left would lift to the original German front line system allowing the left Brigade to take its objective. At 2 am the artillery supporting the attack on the right would lift to the original German front line trenches in order for the right Brigade to take its objective.[10] Currie ordered enfilade fire support from the 1st Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade. A system of flares was set up in order to denote the progress of the attack, white flares meaning the 1st objective had been reached, red flares denoting the final objective had been reached, and green flares stating the attack had been held up. Currie also ordered that the 1st Canadian Division Engineers consisting of engineers, pioneers and carrying parties would follow up the attack in order that "our old Support line will be at once consolidated."[11]

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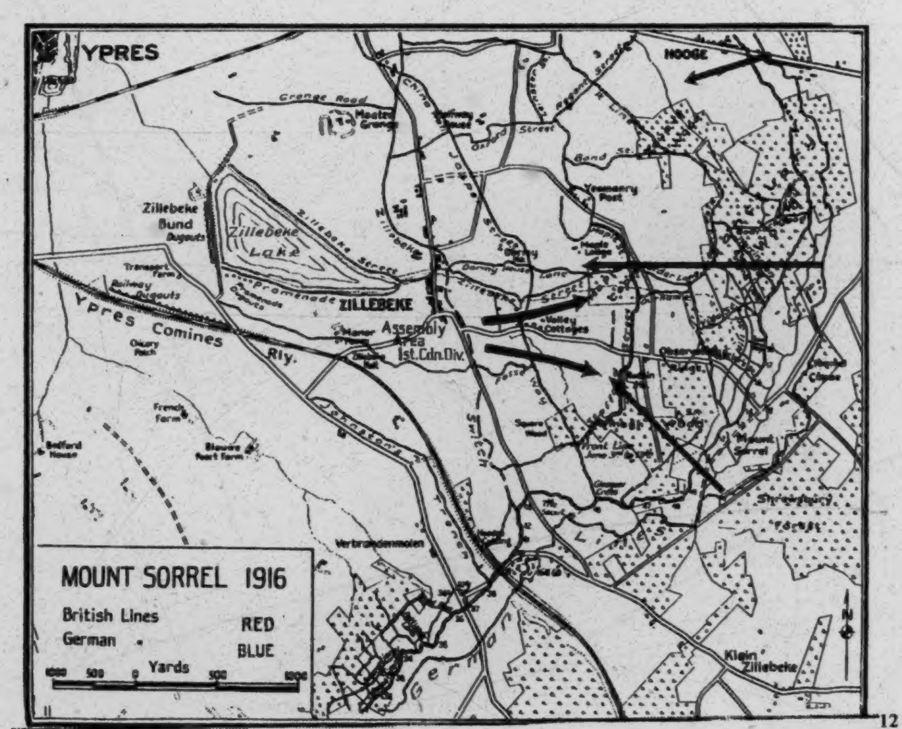
[9] Arthur Currie. Operation Order No. 78, June 10th 1916. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of the 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. RG9 111 C-3, boxes 4006 to 4022.

Map 3


YPRES
HOOGE
Grange Road
Zillebeke Bund Dugouts
Zillebeke Lake
Zillebeke Street
Yeomanry Post
Promenade
ZILLEBEKE
Assembly Area 1st.Cdn.Div.
Ypres Comines Rly.
Mount Sorrel
Verbrandenmolen
Klein Zillebeke
MOUNT SORREL 1916
British Lines RED
German BLUE
Yards
1000 500 0 500 1000

[12]

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[10] Arthur Currie. Operation Order No. 78, June 10th 1916.
[11] Arthur Currie. Operation Order No. 78, June 10th 1916.
[12] Map 3 courtesy of Hugh M. Urquhart. Arthur Currie: The Biography of a Great Canadian. Vancouver: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1950.

The 1st division attack was a spectacular success. All the objectives were obtained and the Canadians were once again on the high ground in the eastern portion of the Salient. The extreme detail of the attack plan was a major factor in the success of the Canadian troops. A combination of great planning, inventive tactics and intense artillery concentration had resulted in the Canadians achieving their objectives within the first hour of the attack. Furthermore, Currie had anticipated that the Germans would mass a counter-attack shortly after losing their positions and therefore ordered that the artillery lay down a barrage on the original German front lines, positions that would be used by the Germans to launch their counter-attack. The Germans continued to shell the Canadian positions throughout the day but the consolidation of the re-taken positions had begun. That night, reserve Battalions relieved the exhausted men of the 1st Division and the battle of Mount Sorrel had come to an end.

The battle of Mount Sorrel provides an opportunity to analyze Currie's first experience in planning an attack. As a Brigade commander Currie followed a pre-set battle plan and made his tactical decisions based on the necessity of the moment. Often he had little input into the planning of attacks but merely followed a tactical outline set laid down by his superior officer. Now he was in a position to dictate the methods and the means of the attack and implemented many of the lessons learnt in the previous years of the war.

Through a study of this battle one can witness Currie applying the lessons he had learned over the last year and a half. A large artillery bombardment followed by waves of infantry characterized most of the attacks throughout this early period of the war. Currie made modifications that increased the efficiency of this style of attack. He ordered consolidation parties to work closely behind the attack wave in order to rebuild destroyed trenches. He made sure that engineers were close at hand in case any significant geographical obstacles had to be overcome. Currie ordered detailed reconnaissance to be done on the enemy positions prior to the attack taking place. Furthermore, he ordered the artillery to prepare barrages designed to attack areas in which the Germans would mass for a counter-attack.

Currie had studied the enemy long enough to comprehend their fundamental tactical doctrine of counter-attacking. He knew quite well that the Germans would immediately move from the defensive to the offensive in order to recapture lost ground. At 6:45 am Currie received word from 5th Battalion that the Germans were indeed preparing a counter-attack and as Currie wrote, "a concentrated bombardment on the front opposite Mount Sorrel, lasting for a quarter of an hour, had previously been arranged to take place at this time so that if any German infantry had been massing for a counter attack they must have suffered very heavily."[13] By ordering an artillery barrage on the German reserve trenches he was able to neutralize any build up of a German counter-attacking force ingeniously eliminating the German army's most relied upon tactic.

Finally, one of the most interesting aspects of this attack was Currie's artillery plan. The earliest signs of what came to be known as the 'creeping barrage' can be seen in Currie's barrage plan. He set a specific time frame in which the artillery would move from one objective to the other in order to neutralize as much German resistance as possible. Obviously this attack pales in comparison to the complicated artillery plans seen in the later stages of the war; however, it demonstrated the success that could be achieved using the artillery in such a flexible manner. Currie attested to the new tactical role the artillery played in the victory when he wrote, "The German first line was taken very easily the garrison still being cowed by the Artillery bombardment and not expecting the Infantry assault so soon after the Artillery lift."[14] This tactical implementation of artillery would continue to grow in its complexity and scope throughout the following years.

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[13] Arthur Currie. Report on the Operations of the 1st Canadian Division, From June 2nd to June 14th 1916. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.

Currie's first major test as a division commander was complete. Although this attack followed many of the traditional elements of earlier attacks, Currie showed signs of flexibility, adaptability and inventiveness. He employed artillery in a new, malleable manner stressing coordination with the infantry. Currie exploited the German propensity to counter-attack by directing artillery barrages on the areas that German troop build-ups would occur. By ordering engineers and consolidation parties to work closely behind the infantry he explored the possibilities of multi-branch cooperation during an operation. In Currie's first offensive action he had proven himself a capable and tactically sound commander.

2.3 The August Memorandum, August 1916

In July of 1916 British forces launched a massive offensive. British Commander in Chief, Douglas Haig, intended to relieve the pressure on his French allies defending against a German offensive in the Verdun Sector. Haig believed that with German resources engaged at Verdun, he could exploit a weakened German front line and finally break through the German defensive system. Currie's Division was not to be fed into the 'meat grinder' that typified most of the Somme battles until September. On 13 August the 1st Division was removed from the Ypres Salient and sent to the rear of the Somme battlefield in order to undergo extensive training. It is during this period that one can see Currie's development as a commander evolve further. Currie felt strongly about the constant training of his men, but more importantly he believed that he himself must train as a commander. This meant constantly devouring information and continually learning from his experiences and the experiences of others. This period of training occurred near the town of St. Omer and as Currie's official biographer writes, "Currie was on the training ground every day."[15] The training included every aspect of Divisional level fighting and even included exercises in co-operation between airplane patrols and infantry. Currie talked with any officers he could find who had experience fighting in the Somme and compiled a detailed mental sketch of the tactical changes taking place within the British army.

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[14] Arthur Currie. Report on the Operations of the 1st Canadian Division, From June 2nd to June 14th 1916.

One of the most remarkable things to come out of this period of intense training was a document written by Currie on 15 August directed to his subordinate officers. It is a memorandum detailing what aspects of training were to be focused on by the 1st Division as well as numerous comments on various German tactics. In it, Currie focused on ways to increase the efficiency of offensive operations, specifically emphasizing constant communication between all elements of the division as well as numerous tactical adaptations. This memorandum needs to be studied in some detail in order to understand how far Currie had developed as a commander and military thinker since his first days in the 2nd Brigade.

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[15] Urquhart, p 131.

Currie's first point is very similar to the basic theoretical concepts of the creeping barrage tactic employed so successfully in the latter years of the war. He noted that up to this point infantry attacks were preceded by a heavy artillery bombardment of the enemy's positions. This meant that often the conclusion of the artillery bombardment would in turn mark the signal for the advance of the infantry. By this point in the war it was obvious to Currie that this tactic proved not only ineffective but deadly. In his memorandum Currie rejected this traditional tactic when he stated, "Now, the beginning of the artillery fire marks the beginning of the infantry advance."[16] Currie explained how this new method of artillery barrage would last only as long as it took the infantry to move from their trench to the enemy's trench so that the "fire is lifted and the infantry are into the hostile trench before the enemy has time to man the parapet or bring a machine gun into action."[17] Currie was discussing an embryonic version of the creeping barrage tactic and stressing infantry and artillery cooperation. He emphasized that the infantry were to follow the artillery barrage as close as possible in order to reach the hostile trench before the Germans could man any machine guns. He went as far as to write, "It is far better to lose a few of our own men from our own Artillery fire than to sacrifice hundreds by hostile machine gun fire."[18] Currie had always been concerned with reducing casualties and his practical mind shines through in his understanding that by sacrificing a small number of casualties to friendly fire he could in turn reduce the large number from enemy machine gun fire.

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[16] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of the 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. RG9 111 C-3, boxes 4006 to 4022.
[17] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.
[18] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.

In recognition of the German ability to predict artillery barrages, Currie called for a variation in the implementation of artillery attacks. He argued for constant alterations in the length of bombardments, in the artillery pieces used as well as a variation in assigned objectives. This was all due to the fact that Currie believed "the Bosch will soon get to know just what our method is and take steps accordingly."[19] He wanted to maintain a continual element of surprise and initiative when attacking and ordered that steps be taken within the artillery to retain this advantage.

Currie articulated that the infantry must attack at the very second they are ordered to do so in order to avoid giving the enemy time to mount a proper defence. He demanded that all watches must be synchronized and wrote, "I will regard it as a serious neglect of duty if a watch is out of time at any hour of the day. In the course of our training I shall ask many officers the time just to see if any attention is being paid to this order."[20] He was adamant about this issue.

Currie demanded that a number of minor points also be adhered to. For instance, he advocated the use of forward observation officers acting in a dual role as intelligence officers and ordered they communicate all information gathered while at their post. Currie stressed that he wanted all information made clear and concise and sent back immediately to headquarters. He wrote, "I want a great deal of attention paid to Map-Reading… You can see what would happen if you called for Artillery on a certain position on the map thinking that your trenches were in a certain definite place if they were not there at all."[21] He pointed out that the use of upright signs had proven successful in the past in identifying friendly and hostile trenches and ordered that it be continued at all possible opportunities. This was especially important for the heavy artillery, he argued, because "our Heavy Artillery, on account of the ploughed up condition of the ground, have often found it very difficult to recognize where our infantry are."[22] Many of these points were intended to increase the efficiency of cooperation between the artillery and infantry.

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[19] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.
[20] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.
[21] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.

Currie fully understood the German practice of counter-attacking any lost position and therefore ordered steps to be taken to prevent such attacks. His first and most firmly stressed point was the placement of Lewis Guns "out in the shell holes in front of the line."[23] He pointed out that the forward positions of these guns would most likely escape the enemy's shelling of the captured trench and "break up and drive back a counter-attack."[24] Furthermore, these machine gun nests could then be joined with the newly consolidated trenches and act as advanced positions.

Currie also highlighted the fact that advanced patrols must continually be sent out in order to keep in contact with the enemy. These advanced patrols could detect any signs of a counter-attack as well as any weaknesses in the enemy lines. Currie wrote, "Our successes [in the past] would have been very much greater had that success been exploited."[25] The exploitation of a successful operation could only occur through constant patrol of the enemy's positions. Contact patrols could discover weak points in the enemy line as well as detect any signs of enemy build up.

Currie wrote about the proper procedure for the consolidation of trenches. He pointed out that certain officers have argued against the distribution of wire in front of newly consolidated positions. He emphasized that to properly consolidate a position wire must be put out and a trench must be dug at least 5 feet deep with a fire step. He further ordered that strong points be built in the rear of these newly consolidated positions. In recognition of the vulnerability of flanks Currie ordered that units must always be kept in reserve to protect and consolidate flank positions.

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[22] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.
[23] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.
[24] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.
[25] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.

In the memorandum, he drew attention to the use of grenades or bombs. He recognized that bombs played a crucial role in clearing up hostile trenches yet was concerned about his men relying too heavily on bombs and not enough on their own rifles. He wrote, "Every man carries two grenades into the attack, but these are not to be used except on an order from an officer. They are simply a reserve supply of bombs."[26] This was a curious order. When studying Arthur Currie in 1918, he continually argued for the increase in material (artillery, grenades, etc) in order to decrease the amount of casualties. However in this order one can see that this was not always the case. It became evident soon after the Somme offensive, and the Canadian attacks on Regina Trench, that the use of bombs served as the best method of capturing and holding an enemy trench. At this time, however, Currie was of the mindset that riflemen must predominantly use their rifles and that the bomber squads are to be the primary employers of the hand grenades. This strict division of labour obviously posed a problem when riflemen were ordered to capture and hold hostile positions. Furthermore, to expect a soldier to ask his officer permission to employ bombs when in the midst of combat seems unrealistic especially when that soldier is well aware of the effectiveness of the use of bombs on enemy positions. However, it can be argued that the limitations Currie imposed on the use of grenades can be a direct result of Currie's recognition of the supply problems rampant throughout the entire B.E.F.[27] This is a valid argument, but what makes this order so interesting is the fact that Currie considered the bombs to be a reserve supply and one only to be used when given permission from a superior officer.

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[26] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.

Currie went on to discuss the different elements of signaling that must continue to be used. These included pigeons, runners and what he claimed as the most effective method "flag waving" or visual signaling. In a period where communication technology was rudimentary there grew to be a heavy reliance on these signal systems.

Finishing his memorandum, Currie addressed one of the newest technologies in the entire war, airplanes. He mentions the fact that airplanes had been highly successful in mapping and scouting the battlefield and wrote, "All Brigades will practice with the aeroplanes during training."[28] Obviously Currie embraced this new weapon of war and like many other new technologies hoped to employ it to further increase the combat effectiveness of his units.

This memorandum, released in August of 1916, is highly intriguing from a historiographical perspective due to the fact that neither Urquhart nor Hyatt, Currie's two main biographers, mentions it in their texts. Currie's Verdun report, released later that year, is celebrated as a doctrine promoting many of the tactical innovations implemented by the Canadian Corps in the latter of the stages of the war. However, the August memorandum advocated some of the earliest elements of Currie's tactical innovations; the most important being the emphasis on artillery and infantry cooperation. Currie laid the groundwork for methods of trench consolidation, signaling, and the necessity of contact patrols and scouting of enemy positions. He promoted new methods of defence against German counter-attacks. Furthermore, he advocated the use of airplanes in cooperation with the infantry. All the elements within this memorandum characterized the period of refinement that Currie's command philosophy was going through.

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[27] Bill Rawling discussed this problem in his book Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918.

[28] Arthur Currie. Memorandum to 1st Canadian Division, August 15th 1916.

What gives the August memorandum such significance, however, is that before Currie plays a role in the Somme offensive and before he tours the battlefields of Verdun, he is already formulating concepts and ideas that in the future will expand into standard tactical procedures for most of the B.E.F. What is equally interesting about this memorandum is that although tactically innovative, its initiatives seem to be disregarded during most of the Somme fighting when the Canadian Corps, and its allies, become bogged down in a series of unimaginative frontal assaults. The military machine that was heavily engaged in the Somme offensive was not prepared to accept new tactical initiatives. It would take the conclusion of the Somme offensive and the realizations of its disastrous outcome in order for the slow process of change to begin.

2.4 Regina Trench and December Raid, October and December 1916

The Somme Offensive was the culmination of the belief by commanders of both sides that the war machine, supported by massive amounts of material, could punish the enemy so severely that they would have neither the manpower nor the morale to continue fighting. The belief in the power of material, specifically artillery, led to what is now considered one of the most disastrous campaigns, in terms of loss of life, in the history of warfare. In September of 1916 Currie's division took its place in the front line for a thirty-five day tour that would nearly destroy the division.

The 1st Division's experience during the Somme offensive was of a monotonous, day to day struggle against their German opponents marked by continual fighting, shelling "and at the conclusion of that period of holding and trench to trench fighting it had no permanent gains to show for its casualties."[29] When Currie's division came into the line they found that their designated section was nothing more than a series of shell holes loosely connected but expertly sited by German artillery. It was difficult for Currie or the men to distinguish where the front line actually started and it took several days for Currie and his division to establish a proper trench position. Most of September consisted of minor operations with little gains to show and increasing casualties. Currie's major test on the Somme came in early October when his division led an assault against the German occupied high ground known as Regina Trench.

Regina Trench was a well fortified German trench system situated on a reverse slope partially concealing it from British artillery. There had been two attacks made on the trench prior to the Canadian operations on 8 October, both were repelled with heavy casualties. Currie knew that the trench was well defended and became increasingly concerned about the lack of information regarding the German positions as well as the limited preparations being made for the attack. Even though he made numerous efforts to address these concerns, he still felt uneasy about the attack and requested it be postponed until further reconnaissance could be conducted and preparations made. His request was denied; the attack went in as scheduled and was a dismal failure.

Currie's 1st and 3rd Brigades moved across no man's land relatively unharmed, protected as they were by allied artillery, yet once the barrage lifted they found the German wire intact and German soldiers rushing out to man their machine gun posts.

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[29] Urquhart, p 131.

The Canadians were still able to capture small elements of the German position but were forced to retire when no support was made available. Eventually the Brigades of the 1st Division were forced back to the original Canadian line to prepare to fend off a German counter-attack.

In a report issued four days later Currie cited four main factors that contributed to the defeat on 8 October. Firstly, he stated that the wire-cutting program specifically designed by the artillery failed. "The wire was not satisfactorily cut, in some cases being practically undamaged by our Artillery."[30] This posed an obvious problem to an attacking force that is then forced to deal with the wire while the Germans rushed out of their dugouts to man their positions.

The second major problem was the diminished supply of bombs. Currie noted how the uncut wire forced the attacking troops to "join trenches by bombing. This entailed so great an expenditure of bombs that the supply was unable to meet the demand."[31] When the soldiers exhausted their supply of bombs they could no longer hold any captured positions and were forced to retire. As Jack Hyatt writes, "Here, according to Currie, was the real rub. It was possible, even under the adverse conditions at the Somme, to get into the enemy trenches. But once there the attackers could not hope to hold out unless reinforced and well supplied with bombs and ammunition."[32] Furthermore, the timing of the attack made it difficult to supply the men with the necessary bombs. The attack commenced in the early hours of the morning, once the men were in the enemy's trench any sort of supply route would be vulnerable to artillery attack due to the daylight. Prior to the operation, Currie argued for the attack to commence later in the day so that by the time the men were in the opposing trenches they could construct a supply trench under the cover of darkness. Currie wrote, "If the attack had been delivered any time after mid-day, I believe we would be there yet."[33] He argued this based on the fact that a secure supply route would have enabled a continual supply of bombs allowing for further consolidation of the enemy trench.

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[30] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of the 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. RG9 111 C-3, boxes 4006 to 4022.

[31] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916

[32] Hyatt, p 60.

The third major problem afflicting the operation on the 8th was the inaccurate reconnaissance done on the enemy's position. Specifically, "the infantry should have reported with greater accuracy on the state of the wire."[34] Due to the lack of proper reconnaissance senior commanders believed the wire to be destroyed and ordered the attack to commence as scheduled.

The fourth and most glaring aspect of the defeat was that a number of the soldiers were new recruits and largely untrained. The operations in the Ypres salient had drained the 1st Division of many of its veterans and resulted in an influx of new recruits, both officers and N.C.O's, prior to the 1st Division's role in the Somme. Currie pointed out that, "Many of the new drafts have never thrown a bomb other than a Jam Pot, something we have not used here for eighteen months."[35] This was an obvious problem and one that continually plagued many of the armies on the Western Front. The need for reinforcements was so great that often the training of the recruits would suffer because of the rush to get them to the front.

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[33] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916

[34] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916

[35] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916

Through an analysis of the fighting Currie cited five major lessons to be garnered. Firstly, "the necessity of dependable patrolling."[36] Patrolling enabled a greater understanding of the enemy positions, specifically with concern to the status of their barbed wire and trench locations. Secondly, "That the getting of the trench does not mean the getting of the Objective. We must not only clear the enemy out of the trenches but we must control all his approaches to it."[37] Currie is referring to the fact that stretches of Regina trench were captured but the entire objective had not been secured. The portion of the trench that was captured merely meant a foothold had been gained and needed to be expanded. Currie again pointed out that, "The making of the supply of bombs sufficient, as far as is humanly possible."[38] Essentially, Currie realized that bombs were the most efficient weapon for capturing enemy trenches and an ample supply must always be available. This is extremely interesting in light of his 16 August memorandum where he discussed limiting the use of bombs by his soldiers not designated in bombing units. It is obvious that the realities of trench warfare on the Somme had altered his thoughts on this weapon.

The fourth lesson Currie addressed is that there must be a focus on the "development of qualities of leadership and resolution in officers."[39] This referred to the inexperience of junior officers due to the lack of training prior to their arrival at the front. Furthermore, Currie commented, "When drafts come to this country they should already be trained."[40] Although this point seems blatantly obvious, Currie continually lamented the poor training recruits received prior to their incorporation into front-line units. This concern with the poor training of his soldiers was a motivating factor in his dedication to training his units during any period of inactivity.

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[36] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916
[37] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916
[38] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916.
[39] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916.
[40] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916.

Currie exhibited the seriousness with which he treated the investigations into Regina Trench when he wrote, "All the lessons to be learned from these operations, all the points, and there are many, which can be improved, all the things left undone, done badly or which might have been done better, I shall take up not only with the 3rd and 4th Battalions, but with all the Battalions of this division."[41] This was the last major operation by the 1st Division in the Somme offensive and later that month they were taken out of the line and moved north towards the area in and around Vimy Ridge.

Once moved into the Vimy sector in November of 1916, the Canadian Corps enjoyed a period of relative inactivity. This did not mean that minor operations did not occur, merely that there was no major offensive action by either side until April of 1917. During this period the Canadian troops were engaged in constant trench raiding designed to capture prisoners, obtain information on the enemy's positions, and decrease enemy morale as well as increase Canadian morale. Currie did not wholeheartedly accept this policy of constant trench raiding favoured by the Corps commander and many senior officers. He did not flatly refuse to authorize raids by 1st Division units; he merely felt that the numerous raids would have an adverse effect on Canadian morale. Currie believed that because the 1st Division's morale was already quite high, incurring casualties on seemingly pointless raids would merely detract from the already high quality of morale enjoyed by the division. Keeping this in mind, there were several small-scale raids authorized by Currie. One in particular deserves some mention.

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[41] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, October 12th 1916.

On 9 December, elements of the 3rd Canadian Battalion led by Major H.S. Cooper carried out a successful raid on German positions. Although this was a minor raid and relatively unimportant, Currie sent out a memorandum concerning lessons derived from the operation. This is significant in that it shows Currie studied both major and minor operations in order to better understand the nature of a World War One battlefield. Instances like this showed that Currie was able to break down even the smallest operations and discover operational methods that could be better utilized throughout his division and on a larger scale.

He gleaned several important lessons from this raid. Firstly, Currie wrote what can be considered the mantra of his command philosophy, "success almost invariably attends the execution of an operation based on a well considered, well-practiced plan, if carried out with pluck, dash and determination."[42] Currie practiced this method of preparation prior to the Battle of Mount Sorrel and he would play a major part in the implementation of similar pre-battle preparations in the months leading up to the attack on Vimy Ridge. The practical application of this statement can be witnessed in nearly every one of Currie's operations.

Currie reinforced the "necessity for constant energetic and intelligent patrolling. If the enemy had patrolled his front in the right manner, our party would have been discovered before it was too late."[43] He continued to use the enemy as an example when he wrote, "The necessity for proper wire entanglements. The German wire was so close to their parapet that our centre party was able to bomb their trench…"[44] Currie's analysis of these two points showcased his ability to garner as much information as possible not only from the actions of his own troops but by the responses of the enemy. His final point addressed the cooperative role played by the artillery and infantry, "Co-operation with the artillery is not yet close enough with us... It took too long – six minutes – to commence the 'Diversion'."[45] Currie understood that the key to a successful infantry attack was the ability of the artillery to implement a barrage that neutralized German resistance. In this operation he expressed his displeasure with this aspect of the raid and once again emphasized how the artillery and infantry must work closely together in order for German positions to be overcome. This memorandum acts as a window into the developing mind of Currie as a commander. Although he had just come out of the Somme and submitted reports on the operations during that offensive, he continued to use recent operations, no matter how minor, to develop and reinforce tactical initiatives throughout his units.

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[42] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, December 20th 1916. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of the 1st Canadian Division Headquarters. RG9 111 C-3, boxes 4006 to 4022.
[43] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, December 20th 1916.
[44] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, December 20th 1916.

2.5-The Verdun Report

In January of 1917 Currie, along with other senior officers in the B.E.F., was ordered to travel to Verdun and examine the French and German operations in and around the ancient fortress town. The visiting officers were split into two groups and inspected a portion of the battlefield where a division had attacked in October and a different portion of the battlefield where a division had attacked in December. Currie was relentless in his questioning of the officers who took part in the battle and attended the entire visit with the intensity typical of a man bent on devouring as much information as possible. From this inspection Currie produced the Verdun Report. It is considered by many to be his most significant contribution to the tactical initiatives in the B.E.F.[46]

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[45] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, December 20th 1916.

His report focused primarily on the offensive operations carried out by the French during the period under examination. Some of the recommendations he made in the report were already being tried in various forms throughout the B.E.F. What gives this report such significance, however, is that Currie's emphasis on the artillery's role in the battle, platoon-level tactics, and troop preparation became standard in the Canadian Corps shortly after this report was filed. Furthermore, these initiatives were implemented at the battle of Vimy Ridge, a battle that began a period of success for the Canadian Corps, a period unmatched by most of the formations on the Western Front.

Currie derived numerous lessons from the French operations in October and December of 1916. Many are minor points that need little explanation yet two or three stand out as important observations. One minor point that stands out is the claim that "the greater chances for success [come] when attacking on a wide front."[47] Currie argued that minor operations with limited resources result in a disproportionate ratio of casualties to objectives obtained. On his return to the 1st Canadian Division he maintained this position by limiting the amount of trench raiding within his division, much to the chagrin of his commander Julian Byng who supported trench raiding whole heartedly.

Currie's report argued that tactical features should become a unit's objective, not necessarily an enemy trench. As he explained, "We should at all times define for our objectives positions of tactical importance to us, the loss of which must seriously hamper and inconvenience the enemy."[48] This is an interesting observation because up to that point every attack Currie commanded had been directed towards the occupation of an enemy trench, regardless of its geographical position. Currie noted emphatically that the French would set as their objectives geographical features that held tactical importance for both sides.

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[46] See Daniel Dancocks' discussion of Currie and the Verdun Report.
[47] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.

One of his points comes off as almost arrogant in its simplicity. He stated that attacks should not go through unless, "you are reasonably sure that all hostile trenches are practically destroyed and machine guns 'done in.' That the morale of the enemy shows him ripe for attacking."[49] One would consider this point to be the ultimate objective of any pre-offensive preparation, yet this was rarely the case. For instance, Currie pointed out that prior to the attack on Regina Trench the enemy positions were neither destroyed nor the opposition weakened in any form before his division was ordered to assault the German position. Currie obviously felt the need to impress this point based on his previous combat experience.

Finally, Currie discussed the distribution of maps within the French army. He pointed out that "all commanders of units, even down to the smallest units, had one. I think this is something wherein we can improve. In the last sector which the 1st Canadian Division held, my G.S.O. 1 and I had to be content with the same map."[50] Currie felt strongly about this issue and prior to the attack on Vimy Ridge distributed maps right down to platoon level commanders in order that all units knew their immediate objectives as well as the entire corps' objectives.

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[48] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

[49] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

[50] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

These last few points are minor in comparison to Currie's dissection of the role the artillery and infantry played in the French attacks. To begin with, Currie spent ample time analyzing the French use of artillery during the Verdun operations. One of Currie's main arguments is the need for artillery to be placed at the disposal of the Division commander and hold "him responsible for the proper preparation of the ground for attack."[51] Heavy artillery was the most effective artillery to use against enemy positions. However, in the B.E.F. the heavy artillery was under the command of the corps commander. As Currie pointed out, "Take the matter of wire – oftentimes this must be destroyed by Heavy Artillery and the Divisional commander must be satisfied that the destruction is complete before the attack takes place. It seems to be reasonable that every weapon required for that destruction should be in his hands."[52] Once given command of the artillery, Currie argued, the division commander could then sub-divide his artillery into separate units designated for specific tasks. Each unit would then be placed under the command of a divisional artillery officer and be designated a specific task. For instance, one unit would be in charge of counter-battery fire, another for harassing enemy supply and reinforcement lines, another unit would be in charge of the infantry support barrage and still another for the destruction of the enemy's fortifications. This operational practice, he argued, would create a more efficient and centralized method of employing artillery against the enemy.

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[51] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

[52] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

Currie emphasized counter battery work stating that one of the most important lessons to be derived from the French is their "methodical destruction of the German guns and the neutralization of those not destroyed."[53] He pointed out that the French devoted most of their heavy artillery to the task of counter-battery work and this role maintained high priority up until commencement of the attack. Currie obviously felt this to be an important aspect of the French operations. His emphasis on this artillery role led to the counter-battery formations within the Canadian Corps becoming, by 1918, the "envy of the entire Allied command."[54]

Currie argued for "the possibility of retaining the element of surprise even when the artillery preparations last some few weeks."[55] Traditionally this aspect had posed a problem for the B.E.F as the artillery barrages were often a signal to the enemy of an impending attack. The French countered this blatant signal of attack by varying their barrages in the days leading up to the attack. As Currie explained, "several times before the day of the attack they laid down the entire artillery program, going so far as to actually put down barrages similar to those laid down on the day of the attack."[56] This had multiple effects. Firstly, it would confuse the enemy and prevent him from knowing when an attack would commence. On the actual day of the attack the barrage would not seem any different than previous ones laid down, therefore reducing the enemy's suspicion of an attack. Currie wrote, "They attach great importance to there being no noticeable change in the artillery fire on the day of the attack, in order that the enemy may have no grounds to suspect that the attack is to take place."[57] Secondly, it would force the Germans to return fire therefore exposing their gun positions for the purpose of counter-battery work. Thirdly, it would allow the French to find any weaknesses within their own barrage program allowing them time to correct it before the attack. Finally, it would give the gunners much needed practice in implementing the intended barrage.

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[53] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.
[54] Schreiber, p 23.
[55] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.
[56] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

Currie analyzed various aspects within the French infantry attack doctrine. He first addressed the timing of the infantry's advance during the attack. He argued that it was imperative that all "Battalions taking part in the attack cross the barrage zone as soon as possible, correcting their distance and pace subsequently."[58] Currie pointed out how the French stressed the importance of moving out of their trenches at exactly zero hour and obtaining their objectives as quickly as possible. Currie had already stressed the importance of strictly adhering to the attack schedule in his August memorandum and finds evidence in the successful French attacks to support this declaration.

Concerning the pace of the infantry's advance Currie wrote, "Too often, when our infantry are checked, they pause and ask for additional preparation before carrying on. This artillery preparation cannot be quickly and easily arranged for and is often not necessary. Our troops must be taught the power of manoeuvre and that before giving up they must employ to the utmost extent all the weapons with which they are armed and have available."[59] He pointed out that the French employed a system of intensive training at the platoon and company level in order to ready units to overcome German points of resistance. Currie stated, "Before the war we endeavored to make the Platoon a self-reliant and self-sufficient unit of battle. Owing to the demands for so many specialists, there grew up in our Battalions a wrong system of organization and the development of the initiative of Company, Platoon, Section and Squad leaders were somewhat neglected. It is necessary for us to revive our own training on the old lines."[60] The French emphasis on platoon and company level training allowed for their units to overcome strong German positions using the tactics and specialized weapons available within that formation.

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[57] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

[58] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

[59] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

Finally, Currie argued against the tendency in the B.E.F. to insist upon a standardized number of waves for any attack. For example, he pointed out that certain reports stated that divisions must attack in eight waves. He commented, "It is pernicious to lay down such a doctrine, likewise, you cannot lay down a rule for the strength of a mopping-up party, the factors governing this will readily suggest themselves to the minds of all who properly study the situation when making their plans."[61] He drew the example from the French who altered the number of attack waves depending on each operational circumstance. This position is typical of Currie's command philosophy. He continually emphasized that attacking methods must always be flexible in order to adjust to any change in circumstances on the battlefield.

The most emphatic point in Currie's report concerns infantry training. He wrote, "It must be remembered…that the greatest preparation for an attack consists in training of troops and in this regard I claim we have something to learn from our Ally."[62] The training and preparation that went into the French attacks at Verdun impressed Currie the most. As previously mentioned, he pointed out the successful actions of the French troops at the company and platoon level was a result of the intense training prior to the operation. The French chose their training ground based on its resemblance to the actual battlefield. This method was then employed by the Canadians prior to their attack on Vimy Ridge. Maps were distributed to all ranks giving them an opportunity to focus specifically on their objectives as well as possible points of heavy resistance.

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[60] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

[61] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

One of the more interesting aspects of French preparation is that the troops were taken out of the line at some point prior to the attack where they were re-equipped, given new clothes, fed extremely well and provided with entertainment. As Currie stated they "returned to the line absolutely fresh and highly trained. They were 'storm' troops on a large scale and their morale and esprit-de-corps were consequently very high…The French attach the greatest possible importance to this special training of attacking troops, and in my opinion it is the greatest lesson to be learned from my visit to Verdun."[63]. Currie stressed constant training of his troops even during his time as a Brigade commander but obviously felt there was room for improvement. The preparations of the 1st Division prior to the attack on Vimy Ridge showed that Currie became fanatical about training, making sure that every soldier in his division was fully prepared for the attack.

Daniel Dancocks writes about Currie and the Verdun report stating, "His confidence was well founded: he had discovered the key to tactical success on the

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[62] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.
[63] Arthur Currie. Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December, 1916. February, 1917.

Western Front."[64] This statement is too simplistic. The Verdun report contained many tactical elements that would be applied during the operations of 1918, but it simplifies a complicated matter of implementing and refining tactical methods through a long process of training and trial and error. The Verdun Report did not discover any new tactics, nor did the French invent any of these tactical initiatives. The Verdun report is significant because Currie found that many of the elements he had been pushing in his units were being implemented successfully on a large scale by the French. As Hyatt writes, "he used his visit to push ideas that were already developed in the Canadian Corps and in other British formations."[65] It took a combination of tactical implementation along with strong leadership to fully exploit these tactical revelations.

Currie could only truly affect the units he commanded and on his return to the Vimy sector set out implementing many of the initiatives proposed in the Verdun report. Furthermore, Currie was vindicated in many of the tactical initiatives he had been exploring in his own division through witnessing their successful implementation by the French.

2.6 The Assault on Vimy Ridge

On 9 April 1917 all four Canadian divisions overcame stiff resistance and captured one of the most heavily fortified German defensive networks on the entire Western Front. The ridge provided the Germans with a natural defensive strong point. They constructed a series of defensive positions on top of the ridge as well as on several hills flanking the main ridge. The ridge itself sloped gradually up towards the German positions creating a large observable field of fire for the defenders. The Germans had occupied the ridge for most of the war and it was a complicated and vast network of trenches, dug outs and machine gun nests. The capture of the ridge was a remarkable success that both the British and French had failed to achieve in previous attempts. The battle of Vimy Ridge has been much celebrated in Canadian history and folklore. It marked a turning point in the war for the Canadian corps and ushered in a period of remarkable and undeniable battlefield success. The battle is a highly symbolic victory considered, by some, to be the birthplace of Canadian international recognition.[66] For the purposes of this examination, however, Vimy Ridge acts as the culmination of the 1st Division's tactical development under General Currie. During the battle, the 1st Division employed every element of the tactical initiatives impressed upon them by their commanding officer.

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[64] Dancocks, p 82.
[65] Hyatt, p 63.

The 1st Division attacked on a mile wide front employing six leading Battalions of the 2nd and 3rd Brigades. The assaulting units were accompanied by a massive artillery barrage that crept along the battlefield providing cover for the advancing infantry. During the first phase of the attack stiff resistance came mainly from well-placed machine gun nests. While many German defenders were overpowered by the sheer magnitude of the Canadian artillery, scattered points of fortified German machine gun nests survived to harass the attacking troops. The Canadians overcame these nests employing the various weapons available within the specialized infantry sections as well as the platoon tactics rehearsed in the months leading up to the battle. By 6:15 am the 1st Division was at their first objective, the Black line, 45 minutes after the attack began.

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[66] The book most associated with this symbolic interpretation of the battle of Vimy Ridge is Pierre Berton's Vimy. (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books. 1987.)

At this point, the reserve Battalions of the 1st Division moved forward past the initial lead Battalions to resume the offensive towards the Red line, a supporting German trench line situated in a wide depression on the reverse slope of the hill. By 7 o clock half of the Red line was captured, but a 500-yard section of the German trench remained in enemy hands. Currie ordered that General Griesbach's 1st Brigade be brought up from reserve and put in charge of capturing the remainder of the German trench while the rest of the division pressed on. Griesbach's men met stiff resistance by the remaining German defenders but overcome it quickly and captured the remainder of the Red line. Meanwhile, the 1st division units leading the charge towards the third objective, the Blue line, ran into little resistance and reported it captured shortly after 11 o clock. The final objective, Brown line, lay on the easterly portion of the ridge and its south-easterly direction meant that the 1st division had roughly 3,000 yards to cross in getting to the final objective. The Canadian batteries in the rear were out of range and could not be brought to bear on the German defenders so they had to rely on only the forward batteries to support this final push. Once again the Germans put up stiff resistance but the momentum of the 1st division assault was too much for the defenders and the Brown line was captured by 3 o clock that afternoon. From the Brown line the 1st division could witness the retreating throngs of Germans, as they pulled back from the ridge and across the Douai plain. Out of the four Canadian divisions that attacked on the morning of 9

April, none were able to accomplish all of their objectives in the efficient and quick manner as the 1st division.[67]

One of the main points that must be kept in mind while examining the battle of Vimy Ridge is that Arthur Currie's role in the battle pertains primarily to the 1st division. He was only able to directly prescribe tactical methods to the troops working under him. However, what must be understood is that General Byng, the Canadian Corps commander, had specifically sent Currie to Verdun in order to derive valuable tactical lessons from the French fighting. These lessons, then published in the Verdun report, were given to all senior staff in the Canadian Corps and, presumably, was read by all. Urquhart writes that, "When Currie returned to the Corps, he delivered a series of lectures on the lessons of Verdun at Canadian Corps Headquarters and the headquarters of the four Canadian divisions."[68] Although Currie could only implement certain tactical initiatives within his own division, elements of his Verdun recommendations found their way throughout the corps.

Of all the initiatives discussed in the Verdun report and in Currie's earlier memoranda none stood out at the battle of Vimy ridge as much as the preparation and training of the infantry. The infantry had evolved in a dramatic fashion since Currie first commanded troops back in 1915 and at no other time was this more evident than during the Vimy attack. To begin with, infantry preparation and training was stressed fanatically prior to the operation on 9 April. A mock battlefield had been set up in the rear lines of the Canadian position and the troops of the 1st division along with their 2nd, 3rd and 4th division counterparts practiced constantly on miniature versions of each of their attacking sections. Currie wrote, "The value of the taped course and the preliminary practice over this course…was that every individual taking part in the attack knew his place and what was expected of him."[69] One of the most important tactical manoeuvres needing to be rehearsed was the 'leap-frogging' technique. In earlier attacks during the war, troops would set off towards their objectives and continue until they either captured it or were too tired to maintain the push. The 'leap-frogging' technique was an attempt to continue the momentum of the attack while bringing fresh troops into the battle and relieving tired ones. The manoeuvre began when a lead Battalion would take an objective and then consolidate it. Once this consolidation had taken place, a fresh Battalion from the rear would move up past the lead Battalion to resume the attack towards the next objective. This enabled the momentum of the attack to continue at a fervent pace without tiring out the troops involved in the operation. Because the 1st Division rehearsed their attack on ground similar to the actual battlefield it facilitated an easier implementation of the leap frog tactic.

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[67] For a detailed description of the battle read G.W.L. Nicholson's official history of the Canadian Corps.
[68] Urquhart, p 143.

In accordance with the lessons learned at the Verdun battlefield every soldier in the corps was given a map so that they knew their unit objectives, the objectives of the units next to them, the objectives of the Brigade and the division. Every soldier knew the task at hand, where they were to go and how to get there. This was the first time the Canadian troops had been involved in such a massive distribution of maps and Currie credited this as one of the major factors in his troops stunning success. As he wrote, "They had trained for this particular job, they had rehearsed the attack many times, and each and every man knew just exactly where he was going in the attack, and what he was going to do once he got there."[70] It was this fanatical insistence on planning and preparation that marked Vimy Ridge as such a remarkable battle. As Currie's biographer notes, "The preparations made by the Corps for carrying out these operations were of the most thorough nature; they exceeded by far those made for the previous battles in which the Canadians fought."[71]

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[69] Arthur Currie. Items of Interest and Lessons Learnt. April 9th to May 5th. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.

One of the most important initiatives impressed on the 1st division by Currie and employed in various forms throughout the corps was the focus on platoon level training and infantry specialization, "This organization had enforced a higher training of the Platoon commander and had demonstrated to him his responsibilities and the capabilities of the various arms with which his men are now equipped."[72] In the Verdun report Currie made it clear that the French were successful at knocking out resistance points due to their pre-battle emphasis on training at the platoon level and infantry section. When the 1st division encountered stiff resistance usually in the form of dug in machine gun nests, they were able to overcome these positions quickly and efficiently without having to call on artillery support. Instead of holding up the advance in order to call artillery down on the German positions, training of platoon level tactics enabled the men to employ every weapon within their unit in a methodical, tactical and cooperative manner to overcome such resistance points. Currie wrote, "They knew how to use the bomb, the rifle grenade and the machine gun but best of all they knew the most effective combination of these weapons."[73] It was this training, Currie believed, that enabled the troops to carry out the operation with the confidence, skill and speed necessary to overcome the German positions.

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[70] Arthur Currie. Letter to H.C. Brewster from Arthur Currie. May 31st, 1917. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100.
[71] Urquhart, p 151.
[72] Arthur Currie. Items of Interest and Lessons Learnt. April 9th to May 5th.
[73] Arthur Currie. Letter to H.C. Brewster from Arthur Currie. May 31st, 1917.

In a letter to his friend, B.C. Premier H.C. Brewster, Currie cited a number of factors contributing to the Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge. He reinforced the point that the primary factor was the discipline and confidence of the troops and argued that the intense training and preparation of the soldiers prior to the attack resulted in the discipline and confidence displayed during the operation. Currie went on to address the role of the artillery during the battle when he wrote, "It was perfect, by far the best we have had in the war."[74] During the operation there was an emphasis on a combined arms approach between the infantry and artillery. In previous operations, Currie emphatically stressed that the infantry and artillery needed to cooperate in order to be successful. The battle of Vimy Ridge was, up to that point, the largest and most efficient cooperative effort by both branches. The complicated artillery barrage plan used at the battle of Vimy Ridge was unmatched in the Canadian Corps and arguably the rest of the B.E.F. Specifically, the use of the 'creeping barrage' acted as the most successful tactic employed by the artillery. The 'creeping barrage' led the infantry across no man's land and into the enemy positions, creeping along the battlefield at the same pace of the infantry. This method enabled the infantry to arrive at the German positions before the defenders had an opportunity to recover from the barrage and man their posts. It was a neutralizing tactic.

Currie wrote, "The barrages had been practiced on several occasions previously…and on the day of the attack were as near perfect as could be."[75] What is interesting to note about this comment is that Currie advocated strongly in his Verdun report the constant practicing of the barrage plan. He argued that the intermittent execution of the barrage plan would keep the enemy off balance and unsure as to when the real attack would come. Furthermore, this practice gave the gunners much needed practice time. This preparatory tactic was employed at Vimy Ridge to great success.

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[74] Arthur Currie. Letter to H.C. Brewster from Arthur Currie. May 31st, 1917.
[75] Arthur Currie. Items of Interest and Lessons Learnt. April 9th to May 5th.

Currie did not believe that the intelligence work of his 1st Division had been sufficient. Although raving about the infantry and artillery, he believed there was room for improvement amongst all his officers concerning the collection and dissemination of intelligence. He chastised his men in one report when he stated, "I believe the staff correctly gauge the value of the information gained by the intelligence section, but a greater stimulation of the interest of Battalion commanders, Company and Platoon leaders is required."[76] Currie had always been concerned with knowing as much as possible about the enemy and expected his men to have the same concerns in order to better prepare them for an attack. He pointed out that, "those who study the information gained and draw correct deductions there from, will find victory comes easier." For Currie this was not a redundant point but the foundation for his command philosophy.

One of the more important aspects of the assault on Vimy Ridge was the tactical design of the set-piece attack. In previous operations, objectives were designated for his troops allowing for the possibility of a break through of the German line. Therefore, not all elements of the attacking force were included in the initial assault due to commanders keeping units in reserve for a possible breakthrough. Currie recognized that this method was not working and at Vimy Ridge changed it. The set-piece attack was essentially an operational method in which the attacking commander would set limited, reasonable objectives for his men to achieve. The commander would in turn prepare all elements of his attacking force to secure those objectives. Battles during this period of the war became conducive to this type of attack for two reasons. Firstly, the nature of the ground and the enemy defences prevented any large-scale breakouts that could be exploited and turned into a major route. The ground was often so churned up by artillery, like after the attack on Vimy Ridge, that no adequate support could be brought up to reinforce the exploitation of a broken enemy line. For instance, at Vimy Ridge when the Germans began their retreat across the Douai Plain, commanders from throughout the Canadian Corps called for immediate attacks on the vulnerable German withdrawal. Yet, the artillery could not be brought to bear on the retreating enemy due to the state of the ground being churned up by previous artillery attacks. Mobility for the artillery was severely hampered making it difficult to support an extended infantry advance.

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[76] Arthur Currie. Items of Interest and Lessons Learnt. April 9th to May 5th.

The second major factor that made 'set-piece' attacks so successful was the German doctrine of counter-attacking any lost position. The Germans believed strongly that any position lost needed to be re-taken immediately. The attackers would normally be tired out from their offensive and distanced from their supply lines making them vulnerable to a strong counter-attack. This counter-attack doctrine worked for some time until the allies devised methods to counter it. Currie recommended certain tactical initiatives in previous documents to combat the German doctrine yet none worked as well as the set-piece battle plan. By designating limited objectives and preparing his entire division to reinforce, re-supply and consolidate those limited objectives his troops were able to immediately turn their captured objective into a strong defensive position. During the attack on Vimy Ridge the Germans initiated several small-scale counter attacks but were beaten back heavily each time. This method inflicted heavy casualties on the

Germans due to their repeated assaults on heavily reinforced positions. The tactical implementation of set-piece attacks became Currie's standard method throughout the rest of 1917 and 1918.

The Vimy Ridge operation showcased Currie's ability to gather information from a variety of sources, sift through it and then disseminate elements of it within his own command. Many of the initiatives seen in the Verdun report were translated into practice in the battle of Vimy Ridge. Furthermore, a number of initiatives Currie already implemented bore fruit during the battle. The battle of Vimy Ridge reinforced Currie's belief in the proper preparation and training of soldiers before battle as well as the need for ample artillery support. He had developed a basic command philosophy, refined it on the battlefield and Vimy Ridge became a vindication of his initiatives and was the first time that the set-piece tactical method was used with such success.

In June of 1917 Sir Julian Byng was promoted to command the 3rd Army, and in recognition of his performance the British High Command gave Currie command of the Canadian Corps. This militia officer from Victoria, British Columbia who prior to 1915 had no war time experience whatsoever, would now command one of the most highly regarded corps formations on the Western Front and lead them to a period of unequivocal success.

CONCLUSION

Arthur Currie's evolution from an inexperienced militia-officer into a veteran commander with a successful command philosophy is a fascinating study of generalship. He had developed tactical methods in order to break through the slow moving, siege-like warfare that existed all along the Western Front. Currie initiated tactical reforms at all levels of command and played a significant role in the dissemination of tactical initiatives throughout the entire corps. By 1917 he was in charge of all the Canadian troops on the Western Front and it was his turn to implement these initiatives at a corps level and lead the four Canadian divisions to their most successful period of the war.

The 100 Days Campaign was the final great offensive of the British Expeditionary Force and one that greatly contributed to the defeat of Germany. The Canadian Corps spearheaded every major attack during this operation from Amiens, to the Drocourt-Queant Line, the crossing of the Canal Du Nord, the attack on Valenciennes and finally the capture of Mons. While this thesis has not explored this final phase of the Great War, it is clear that all of the lessons Currie distilled and all of the methods he initiated while as a Brigade and division commander were employed by the Canadian Corps to great success during this campaign.

As a Brigade commander with no previous experience, certain personality traits enabled Currie to adequately command his Brigade in the field. Notably, his common sense, calm demeanor and ability to learn from every action highlighted his time as a Brigade commander. This period can be considered the development stage of Currie's command philosophy. His common sense can be witnessed in his concern for his men's equipment. After the battle of Neuve Chapelle, Currie wrote a report condemning the

Ross Rifle. He denounced it as faulty, claiming that men were throwing it away and replacing it for the British Lee Enfield Rifle. After the battle of St. Julien, he produced a report requesting the immediate replacement of all Colt machine guns with the more efficient Maxim machine gun. He understood that faulty equipment resulted in low morale and a decrease in the efficiency and fighting power of his Brigade. Currie was adamant about the need for proper equipment and argued against sending his men into battle with second-rate weapons. Currie's common sense enabled him to clearly discern faulty elements within his Brigade. Another officer with the same limited experience as Currie may have hesitated to complain about equipment problems for fear of being reprimanded by a senior more professional commander. Once Currie established his viewpoint on the equipment problem, he did not hesitate to issue reports to superior officers regardless of the response he might get.

A further characteristic of Currie's personality that enabled him to command his Brigade efficiently was his calm demeanor. At the battle of 2nd Ypres, Currie's unit was thrown into the thick of battle for the first time. His Brigade was outnumbered by the Germans, faced a chlorine gas attack, was continually denied reinforcements and as the battle wore on, the communication between headquarters and the units around him steadily declined. Eventually, Currie's Brigade became nearly surrounded by German troops while its strength diminished by the minute. In a situation like this, inexperienced commanders like Currie could have easily panicked. However, Currie maintained his composure throughout the battle. He continually risked his life moving from Brigade headquarters to Battalion headquarters in order to discern a clearer picture of the battlefield. He refused to order a withdrawal of his troops until all options had been exhausted. Currie continually requested reinforcements while fighting to prevent German penetration of the Canadian line. It was only on the third day of the battle that Currie realized the situation was impossible and finally ordered an organized withdrawal. The battle of St. Julien is an excellent example of Currie's ability as a commander. Though he had very little battlefield experience, Currie kept his composure in the face of overwhelming odds and little support. He conducted himself the only way he knew how, as a composed individual attempting to garner as much information as possible before making his decisions. The fact that his Brigade held out for so long after the surrounding Canadian Brigades fell back, illuminated Currie's ability to maintain command of his units as well as coordinate effectively with his subordinate officers.

One of the most important aspects of Currie's time as a Brigade commander was his insistence on analyzing every operation he was involved in. His dedication to garnering lessons from every action became his dominant characteristic trait throughout his entire time as a commander on the Western Front. For example, after the battle of St. Julien, Currie pointed out that Canadian counter-attacks must be made by fresh troops with strong artillery support; he referred specifically to the attempted counter-attack by the 10th Brigade to re-take St. Julien from the Germans. Currie noted that this attack failed due to the inadequate artillery support as well as the tired condition of the troops. After the battle of Festubert, Currie argued that their objective would have been held had the artillery been prepared to support his men against the German counter-attacks. The realization of the importance of artillery would play a significant part in the development of Currie's command philosophy throughout the rest of the war.

After the battle of Festubert, Currie continually lamented the fact that the initial attack went in with little or no reconnaissance. A situation developed where neither the troops nor the commanders knew where the objective was and how many Germans were holding it. Foreseeing a disastrous result, Currie recommended the attack be postponed but was ignored. The attack went through and failed. The next day, when Currie was ordered to make a second attack, he vehemently argued for time so that his Brigade could adequately ascertain all the proper information concerning the objective. Currie pointed out that the failure of the first attack was the result of poor reconnaissance. This time his superiors agreed and Currie was allowed to implement a proper reconnaissance scheme in order to prepare his Brigade for the attack. The second attack on 24 May captured the intended objective. However, a lack of artillery support and reinforcements led to a withdrawal. The Battle of Festubert solidified Currie's belief that proper reconnaissance increased a unit's chance of success. Currie's common sense told him this prior to the first attack on Festubert. The failure of this first attack and the success of the second attack vindicated his belief. Currie insisted on detailed and thorough reconnaissance in every operation he commanded for the rest of the war.

Another element of these early battles was the continual need for reinforcements. At St. Julien, Currie made numerous requests for reinforcements. At Festubert, Currie argued that reinforcements would have aided in his Brigades capture of the K.5 trench. By the end of his tenure as Brigade commander Currie realized the importance of a fresh, available reserve in order to support tired front line troops. At St. Julien and Festubert he realized how easily the German counter-attacks could push back exhausted and unsupported troops.

Throughout his time as a Brigade commander Currie relied heavily on his own personality traits to guide him through these early operations. He had no prior battlefield experience, and his previous military training hardly prepared him for the actualities of trench warfare. The only classroom in which Currie could learn was that of the real life battlefield. His common sense, composed demeanor and ability to learn from every operation enabled him to survive these early operations and began the development of a basic command philosophy. By 1916 Currie had developed a fundamental command philosophy that included the need for thorough reconnaissance, ample support in the form of artillery and reinforcements, proper preparation including equipment and training and an insistence on post-operation analysis. Once appointed commander of the 1st Division, this command philosophy would go through the refinement stage. Certain personality traits of Currie, mainly calm demeanour, hyper-analytical mind and common sense, enabled him to forge his basic command philosophy.

Currie wrote numerous reports during his years in command of the 1st Division. Several of these reports detailed his evolving command philosophy. After every major operation, Currie analyzed the tactical methods that worked and those that failed. At the battle of Mount Sorrel, Currie was given an opportunity to plan and conduct an attack for the first time in his career. His insistence on thorough preparation, reconnaissance and a well-prepared artillery plan led to the 1st Division capturing their objective. As a Brigade commander, Currie realized that a well thought out tactical plan, ample artillery support and thorough preparation would lead to success on the Western Front. In his first test as a division commander, he employed all three elements to achieve victory.

At Vimy Ridge, Currie was given an opportunity to play a significant role in the preparation for the attack. In this role he was able to implement a number of tactical initiatives. Currie's input prior to the attack, based heavily on his August memorandum and Verdun Report, acted as a tactical foundation for the preparations and implementations throughout the corps. On 9 April the 1st Division succeeded in achieving its objectives at a speed unequalled by the rest of the corps. Currie's dedication to training and preparation, his insistence on artillery and infantry cooperation and thorough reconnaissance and information gathering were key elements in the success of the 1st Division.

However, when Currie was not allowed this level of pre-operational control his battles often ended in failure. The prime example of this is the attack by 1st Division on Regina Trench. Currie was ordered to capture this well-defended German position without adequate time to prepare an attack plan or ascertain proper reconnaissance information. It was a costly failure and one that left an indelible impression on Currie's mind. It reinforced his belief in the necessity for proper preparation and thorough reconnaissance as well as a realization in the effectiveness of hand bombs in the capture and consolidation of enemy trenches. Prior to Regina Trench, Currie had advocated limited use of hand bombs. After the assaults on Regina Trench, he demanded they be utilized in large quantities. This example shows Currie's adaptability as a commander. He was not one to stick to any sort of pre-conceptions about the use of weapons if he found proof that his pre-conceptions were incorrect.

What makes the operations of 1916 and 1917 so intriguing is that throughout this time Currie published a number of reports that detailed the process by which he analyzed and extracted lessons from every operation. Whereas during his time as a Brigade commander, Currie developed a basic command philosophy based on his battlefield experiences, as a division commander Currie refined this philosophy through a number of in depth analyses of various operations. His August memorandum focused on infantry and artillery cooperation. It revealed the nucleus of the tactical method known as the creeping barrage and stressed the importance of the artillery and infantry working closely together on a strict time schedule. Furthermore, his August memorandum discussed methods of consolidating captured German positions while fending off German counter-attacks. He addressed the fact that the Germans placed a high emphasis on re-capturing lost ground and formulated tactical methods that took advantage of the German counter-attack doctrine.

In December of 1916, Currie released a report commenting on a minor trench raid carried out by elements of the 3rd Battalion. This memorandum showed once again Currie's insistence on effective and well-timed artillery and infantry cooperation. Not satisfied with the cooperation between the two branches during this raid, Currie emphasized that this was a crucial element to any successful operation. He reinforced his demand for thorough reconnaissance and the gathering of information prior to any attack. In this report Currie stated, "Success almost invariably attends the execution of an operation based on a well considered, well-practiced plan, if carried out with pluck, dash and determination."[1] Here, Currie detailed the fundamental element within all his command decisions. Operations had to be well thought out and the troops thoroughly prepared. Once these two factors had been addressed, the operation was to then be carried out quickly and with all the material and resources available.

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[1] Arthur Currie. Report to Canadian Corps Headquarters, December 20th 1916. Library and Archives Canada. Papers of Arthur William Currie. MG30-E100

The most significant report published by Currie came in February of 1917 after his visit to the battlefields of Verdun. Although considered a manual for tactical success on the Western Front, many of the ideas forwarded by Currie in this report had already been discussed and attempted in various forms throughout his time as a commander. Furthermore, almost all the ideas expressed in the Verdun report were used at the battle of Vimy Ridge. Elements like platoon tactics, distribution of maps to all ranks, as well as counter-battery work are tactical initiatives that Currie recommended in the report and implemented within his division. However, the fundamental concepts that can be derived from the Verdun report like artillery-infantry cooperation, detailed and intense training and preparation, thorough and continual reconnaissance were all proposed by Currie in various forms throughout his previous reports. What the Verdun report was able to do, however, was showcase significant elements of tactical reform that were being introduced into the 1st Division, the Canadian Corps and much of the British Expeditionary Force at this time.

The Verdun Report, the August Memorandum and the Trench Raid Report are all windows into Currie's developing mind as a commander. The attacks on Mount Sorrel, Regina Trench, and Vimy Ridge act as the arena in which Currie's tactical initiatives are applied. Most of the period that he spent as a Brigade commander he spent on the defensive, and therefore developed a fundamental command philosophy related to these operations. However, he spent most of his time as a division commander on the offensive and was therefore able to refine his command philosophy into a well-tested doctrine. Vimy Ridge can be considered the culmination of the tactical initiatives forwarded by Currie throughout the years 1915-1917. The battle of Vimy Ridge marks the beginning of the vindication stage for Currie's command philosophy.

The study of Arthur Currie, the commander, provides a window into the developing mind of a man who with no pre-war military experience was able to forge a command philosophy through the carnage of World War One and implement that philosophy with great success. The 'Currie framework' employed in this text is a theoretical framework intended to provide a clear and discernible method with which to analyze a commander who is forced to develop a command philosophy on the battlefield as opposed to pre-war training. It is not intended to act as a methodology or framework for the study of present-day commanders and how they develop or go about developing a command philosophy. It is merely provided as a tool in examining commanders from the past and to help in deconstructing the process of learning and developing that takes place. This study provides an in-depth examination of how a commander learns from his experiences then develops and implements a successful methodology on the battlefield. Arthur Currie embodies this evolution of a commander and presents an interesting case study into the art of generalship.

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